

Socioeconomic Conditions and the Resilience of Coastal Communities: Reassessing Local Development from the Social Margins of Bira Bulukumba Regency

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Abstract

Coastal areas play a strategic role in driving economic growth through fisheries and tourism, yet they also face unevenly distributed socio-ecological vulnerabilities. In Bira, Bulukumba Regency, the rapid expansion of marine tourism, service activities, and small-scale fisheries has shaped a local development landscape that is both dynamic and complex. However, development priorities have not fully positioned vulnerable groups as central actors, leaving segments of the coastal population on the social margins. This study revisits local development from the perspective of social marginality by emphasizing the contribution of the social economy to strengthening coastal community resilience. The research adopts a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with fishers, tourism workers, micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) actors, coastal women, and local stakeholders; focus group discussions; field observations; and a review of development documents. The analysis integrates a social economy framework (mutual aid practices, trust-based networks, cooperatives, and community institutions) with a resilience framework (coping, adaptive, and transformative capacities). The social economy in Bira operates through informal networks such as rotating savings groups, kinship-based solidarity, market information sharing, and reciprocal support, which strengthen income diversification and the management of seasonal risks. However, these practices are still constrained by unequal access to formal capital and policies that prioritize physical investment, making the integration of the social economy into coastal policies essential for more inclusive and resilient development.

Keywords: Coastal Communities, Local Development, Resilience, Social Economy.

INTRODUCTION

Coastal areas constitute socio-economic spaces that play a crucial role in both national and local development. The presence of the sea and coastal resources not only provides economic opportunities through fisheries and tourism sectors but also serves as a sphere for socio-cultural activities that shape the dynamics of coastal community life. In Indonesia, coastal regions are an integral part of societal life due to the country's vast marine territory, which directly influences livelihood patterns, social structures, and the overall level of welfare of coastal populations. However, this significant potential is often not proportional to the well-being experienced by local communities, particularly vulnerable groups located on the social and economic margins (Anah et al., 2020).

Globally, the literature on coastal social-ecological systems emphasizes the complex and interdependent relationships between human communities and marine environments. Coastal systems are conceptualized as social-ecological systems (SES) that require holistic approaches to understand their resilience, vulnerability, and adaptive

capacity in response to external pressures such as climate change, environmental degradation, and economic dynamics. Resilience in this context is not merely the ability to withstand shocks, but also encompasses social adaptation and transformation that enable communities to sustain their livelihoods and social identities over the long term (Sonia M. et al., 2021).

In the context of developing countries such as Indonesia, coastal development challenges are increasingly complex due to persistent social and economic inequalities, particularly among marginalized groups that remain underrepresented in local and national decision-making processes. Development policies that predominantly prioritize macroeconomic growth often neglect aspects of social justice and community well-being, thereby highlighting the need for more inclusive and participatory development approaches (Willya Achmad, 2022).

Development strategies that are oriented solely toward economic growth also risk overlooking the value of the social economy—forms of economic activity that are collective in nature and grounded in

mutual cooperation, social solidarity, and community-based networks that support societal resilience in the face of economic, environmental, and social risks. The social economy offers an alternative perspective for strengthening the resilience of coastal communities by leveraging social capital, informal networks, and traditional institutions in the development of livelihoods and risk management systems (Evans, L., 2022).

Studies on the social economy in coastal communities indicate that mutual aid practices, community-based savings and credit groups, and informal business cooperation can enhance household income diversification and strengthen communities' adaptive capacity to cope with unexpected economic changes. These practices often emerge in response to limited access to formal capital, technology, and education—conditions that commonly characterize socially marginalized coastal areas. Consequently, the social economy should not be viewed merely as an alternative economic activity, but rather as an integral component of coastal community resilience strategies within the pursuit of more equitable and inclusive development (Evans, L., 2022).

Bira, as one of the coastal areas in Bulukumba Regency, exhibits distinctive socio-economic dynamics. The area has experienced rapid development, particularly driven by a vibrant marine tourism sector, while simultaneously serving as a living space for traditional fishing communities and local economic actors who continue to face various structural challenges. The expansion of tourism often creates new economic opportunities; however, it does not automatically ensure an equitable distribution of benefits across all social groups. This condition generates tensions between the need to attract investment and expand the formal economic base, and the imperative to protect traditional livelihoods while improving the welfare of local communities (Anah et al., 2020).

The socio-economic life of coastal communities—including social structures, economic stratification, and cultural value systems—significantly shapes how communities respond to changes resulting from development interventions or new economic expansion. For instance, in certain coastal societies, hierarchical social relations exist between capital-owning fishers and labor fishers, reflecting persistent inequalities. At the same time, values of mutual cooperation and

informal institutions continue to be maintained, even as modernization gradually displaces some traditional practices. These conditions form an important foundation for understanding the role of the social economy within the broader constellation of coastal development (Sudirman A. A. et al., 2023).

The resilience of coastal communities has also become a central focus in local development studies, as these populations are continually exposed to environmental threats such as climate change, extreme tidal events, marine habitat degradation, and global economic pressures that affect livelihood stability. When communities' adaptive capacities are limited, the associated social and economic risks can further exacerbate conditions of vulnerability and declining welfare. Therefore, research on coastal resilience emphasizes the necessity of strengthening local capacities—both structurally and through social institutions—to sustain long-term socio-economic livelihoods (Hakna Ferro-Azcona et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the body of literature that integrates the social economy as an approach to strengthening the resilience of coastal communities in Indonesia—particularly within the context of local development in socially marginalized areas such as Bira, Bulukumba—remains limited. Many coastal development policies continue to adopt a top-down orientation and insufficiently account for local knowledge, community capacities, and social values that constitute critical forms of capital for community resilience. Such policy approaches risk deepening social inequalities, as communities with strong social capital do not necessarily gain equal access to the benefits of formal development initiatives (Marvel H. M. et al., 2020; Mukmin & Krisdyatmiko, 2021).

By bringing together the concepts of the social economy and coastal community resilience within a local development framework, this study seeks to demonstrate how social economy practices can be positioned as inclusive and adaptive development strategies. Reassessing local development from the perspective of social marginality provides space for a more holistic understanding of the role of coastal communities in the development process itself, while also offering policy recommendations that are more responsive to the actual needs of communities in the coastal area of Bira.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Economy as a Social Phenomenon (Embeddedness Theory)

Economic sociology emerges from a critique of the neoclassical economic perspective, which conceptualizes economic activity as rational individual action detached from its social context. Granovetter (1985) introduced the concept of embeddedness, emphasizing that economic actions are always embedded in networks of social relations, norms, values, and social structures. Accordingly, the economic behavior of individuals and groups cannot be understood solely through market mechanisms, but must be analyzed within the broader context of the social relationships that shape and constrain such behavior.

In coastal communities, economic practices such as fishermen's cooperation, profit-sharing systems, rotating savings and credit associations, and kinship networks reflect the strong embeddedness of economic activities within community social structures. The embeddedness perspective explains why the social economy constitutes a socially rational strategy, even though it is often regarded as inefficient within the logic of a purely market-driven economy. Therefore, the social economy is understood as a form of economic organization that operates through social relations, rather than merely through price mechanisms.

Social Capital and Collective Action

The concept of social capital constitutes a central pillar in economic sociology for explaining how social networks, trust, and shared norms generate economic benefits. Bourdieu (1986) conceptualizes social capital as the aggregate of actual and potential resources embedded in relatively durable networks of social relationships. Coleman (1988), meanwhile, emphasizes the role of social capital in facilitating collective action, while Putnam (1993) highlights its contribution to strengthening cooperation and institutional effectiveness.

In the context of coastal communities, social capital functions as a critical buffer against economic and environmental uncertainty. Networks of solidarity and trust enable risk-sharing, information exchange, and the collective management of resources. Social economy institutions, such as fishermen's cooperatives or joint business groups, can be understood as the institutionalization of social capital that directly contributes to community resilience.

Moral Economy and Social Solidarity

Through the concept of the substantive economy, Polanyi (1944) argues that in many societies, economic activities are not governed primarily by market logic, but rather by principles of redistribution, reciprocity, and householding. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the economies of coastal communities, which often operate on the basis of moral values, solidarity, and social obligations.

Within the social economy, economic profit is not always the primary objective; instead, the sustainability of livelihoods and social cohesion are prioritized. Practices such as mutual assistance during periods of scarcity, shared distribution of fishing catches, and community support during crises exemplify what is commonly referred to as the moral economy. This approach positions the social economy as a form of resistance to market penetration that may otherwise erode the social structures of coastal communities.

Institutions and Local Development

Economic sociology places significant emphasis on the role of institutions in shaping economic behavior. North (1990) argues that institutions—both formal and informal—structure incentives and constraints within economic interactions. In the context of local development, community-based institutions such as customary practices, local norms, and grassroots organizations often exert greater influence than formal, top-down policy frameworks.

In coastal areas, development initiatives that disregard local institutions tend to produce social inequalities and marginalization. Conversely, social economy-based development approaches recognize community institutions as central actors in the development process. From an economic sociology perspective, local development should ideally take the form of socially embedded development, in which development processes are rooted in local social structures and capacities.

Resilience as a Socio-Economic Process

The concept of resilience in the social sciences extends beyond mere persistence or survival to encompass the capacities for adaptation and transformation. Folke (2016) emphasizes that resilience emerges from the interactions between social and ecological systems. Within economic sociology, resilience is understood as a social process shaped by power relations, access to resources, and broader social structures.

The social economy contributes to building the resilience of coastal communities through:

1. Coping capacity: social support networks and informal assistance mechanisms;
2. Adaptive capacity: livelihood diversification grounded in social networks;
3. Transformative capacity: institutional change and more inclusive governance arrangements.

Accordingly, resilience should not be viewed solely as a technical or environmental issue, but rather as a product of social relations and wider economic structures.

Social Marginality and Power Relations

Economic sociology also highlights the dimensions of power and inequality embedded within economic processes. Coastal communities are often positioned on the social margins due to limited access to capital, information, and decision-making arenas. The concept of marginality helps explain how development strategies oriented primarily toward economic growth may reproduce social inequalities when they are not accompanied by mechanisms of redistribution and meaningful participation.

By examining local development from the perspective of social marginality, economic sociology provides a critical framework for understanding that the social economy is not merely an alternative economic arrangement, but rather a rational strategy for marginalized groups to sustain their existence and enhance their well-being within economic systems that remain only partially inclusive.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of socio-economic dynamics and the resilience of coastal communities from the perspectives of local actors, particularly groups situated on the social margins. The case study design enables the researcher to examine phenomena contextually and comprehensively within real-life settings, making it well-suited for exploring the relationships between social economy practices, community resilience, and local development in the coastal area of Bira, Bulukumba Regency.

The case study design is applied to capture the complexity of social, economic, and institutional interactions that cannot be reduced to single variables. Accordingly, this research does not aim to produce

statistical generalizations, but rather to generate rich analytical and conceptual insights into local development processes as experienced and interpreted by coastal communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Patterns of Social Economy Practices in the Coastal Community of Bira

The findings from the literature review indicate that social economy practices within coastal communities encompass various forms of collective cooperation, solidarity networks, and informal mechanisms such as rotating savings and credit associations, small-scale cooperatives, and kinship-based collaborations aimed at mitigating economic vulnerability. Studies conducted in several Indonesian coastal communities reveal that such practices function as critical sources of social capital, strengthening household capacities to cope with economic risks and market uncertainties, for instance, rotating savings schemes that support working capital and kinship systems that assist during periods of economic shock.

These patterns are consistent with findings from international studies emphasizing that social capital, including collective networks and self-organized associations, plays a crucial role in building social resilience among fishing communities. The establishment of fishermen's empowerment associations and community-based self-help groups has been shown to enhance communities' ability to shift from heavy dependence on a single income source toward more diversified and adaptive economic strategies capable of responding to external shocks such as seasonal changes or fluctuations in global fish market prices.

In the context of Bira, social economy practices manifest through collaboration among fishers, the active involvement of women in creative economic enterprises, and community initiatives in managing micro-enterprises based on local tourism services. These practices position the social economy not merely as a response to limited access to formal capital, but also as a prerequisite for the sustainability of local livelihoods.

Contributions of Social Economy Practices to Coastal Community Resilience

Coastal community resilience encompasses the capacities to cope, adapt, and transform in response to social, economic, and ecological pressures, including

environmental changes associated with climate variability and development pressures.

1. Coping Capacity

Social economy practices enhance the coping capacity of coastal communities in dealing with emergencies and economic uncertainty. For example, rotating savings and community-based savings and credit groups provide more rapid and flexible access to capital compared to formal financial services, thereby enabling households to manage periods of scarcity or seasonal losses. In addition, networks of social solidarity facilitate the dissemination of information and resources, allowing for quicker response times during crisis situations.

2. Adaptive Capacity

Livelihood diversification represents a key form of adaptation commonly observed in socially cohesive coastal communities. Findings from contemporary studies indicate that diversified livelihood strategies, such as combining fisheries with local tourism, marine aquaculture, and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), enhance household economic stability while simultaneously reducing direct pressure on fisheries resources that are vulnerable to overexploitation.

The relationship between the social economy and adaptive capacity is also evident in co-management-based coastal resource governance models, in which local communities are actively involved in decision-making and monitoring of resource use. Such models strengthen communities' ability to adjust livelihood strategies in response to environmental and policy changes, thereby enhancing overall adaptive capacity.

3. Transformative Capacity

Transformative resilience refers to the capacity of communities to enact fundamental changes in their social and economic structures when confronted with major disruptions, such as technological shifts, global market dynamics, or extreme climate pressures. International studies highlight that community coalitions, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and institutional innovation can catalyze long-term socio-economic transformation by creating space for new business strategies and more inclusive patterns of collaboration.

In the context of tourism, many coastal communities have successfully integrated social economy strategies with community-based tourism initiatives. This approach not only broadens the livelihood base of local populations but also

strengthens community participation in tourism planning and management processes, thereby ensuring a more equitable and sustainable distribution of benefits.

Structural Challenges and Constraints

Although social economy practices demonstrate significant contributions to community resilience, several structural bottlenecks continue to limit their effectiveness. One of the primary constraints is limited access to formal capital and more advanced technologies. Many social economy actors remain reliant on internal funding sources and informal debt mechanisms, which provide only limited capacity for business expansion and scaling.

Moreover, the heavy dependence on small-scale capture fisheries, which globally supply nearly half of fish consumption in developing countries, indicates that, in the absence of appropriate governance support, coastal communities remain highly vulnerable to environmental pressures, climate change, and broader food and economic shocks.

Development policies that tend to prioritize physical infrastructure and large-scale investment often neglect the strengthening of soft infrastructure, such as education, skills training, and institutional support for the social economy. As a result, the benefits of development do not consistently reach marginalized groups located on the social periphery, who are in fact those most in need of support to enhance their resilience. Furthermore, the expansion of other sectors, such as tourism, may generate competition over access to natural resources and public spaces if not regulated through principles of equity and meaningful participation of local communities.

Policy Implications and Empowerment Strategies

Findings from the literature indicate that successful local policies tend to focus on strengthening social capital through support for community-based institutions, entrepreneurship training, and inclusive access to markets and capital. Policy instruments such as co-management of resources and the development of community-based economic infrastructure should be designed to encourage active participation by coastal communities and to create space for locally driven initiatives to develop autonomously.

Furthermore, the participation of women and vulnerable groups within economic decision-making structures needs to be strengthened in order to ensure a more equitable distribution of benefits at the

community level. Policies that embed principles of inclusivity, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and local capacity building are more likely to generate higher levels of community resilience over the long term.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social economy plays a crucial role in strengthening the resilience of coastal communities in Bira, Bulukumba Regency, particularly among groups situated on the social margins. Social economy practices grounded in solidarity, mutual cooperation, and community-based institutions have proven effective in helping communities cope with economic shocks, seasonal uncertainties, and environmental pressures. The social economy contributes to enhanced coping capacity through reciprocal support mechanisms, strengthens adaptive capacity through livelihood diversification across fisheries and tourism sectors, and creates opportunities for transformative resilience through the reinforcement of local institutions.

However, these contributions remain suboptimal due to limited policy support and the dominance of development approaches oriented toward physical investment. Therefore, the integration of the social economy into local development strategies is essential for realizing more inclusive and sustainable coastal development.

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