

## Sustainable Human Resource Development Strategy to Support the blue Economy Tourism Area on Mengare Island

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**ABSTRACT:** This research is a phenomenological study that seeks to examine sustainable human resource development strategies to facilitate the implementation of the blue economy on Mengare Island. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with ten informants, including tourism managers, pertinent government officials, visitors, investors, and MSMEs. The findings of the research indicate that Enhancing human resource capability in Tanjung Widoro Village for blue economy-oriented tourism necessitates stakeholder endorsement and local governance. Digital literacy training and human resource development can enhance environmental competence, operational efficiency, and the empowerment of local populations.

**KEYWORDS:** Sustainable human resource, Blue economy, Digital, Tourism, Mengare

### I. INTRODUCTION

Gresik Regency has significant potential in developing its coastal economy in line with the blue economy concept, which emphasizes the sustainable exploitation of marine and fisheries resources. Mengare Island being one of the tourist areas in the coastal region of Gresik Regency, has several attractions that support the principles of nature and local cultural heritage. This area has a Mangrove Restoration and Learning Center, Exotic Beach, Ayang-Ayang Beach, and the historically significant Fort Lodewijk Fortress. The extensive bandeng covering almost 32,000 hectares, might serve as an additional value for tourist experiences and local products (Mujanah et al., 2015; Nugroho & Mujanah, 2021; Yulianita & Romadhon, 2020).

The potential of the blue economy on Mengare Island has not been fully exploited, particularly in the context of mangrove tourism in Tanjung Widoro Village. One major challenge is the low awareness and participation of the local community, as well as the shortcomings in the competence of human resources (HR) in tourism management. According to a study conducted by Kartika (2022), the tourist sites on Mengare Island do not meet the sufficient standards of sanitation and cleanliness, indicating a pressing need for the enhancement of the capacity of local community management in tourism management.

In this context, the strategy of sustainable human resource development with a digital approach becomes highly relevant. Adopting digital approaches can enhance the competence and skills of local community members through technology-based training, therefore improving tourism management and service quality. In managing blue economy tourist destinations, this strategy will not only increase human resource capacity but will also help overcome the problem of community awareness and involvement.

The objective of this study is to investigate how sustainable human development strategies with digital approaches might be implemented to support the blue economy of tourist areas in Mengare Island. It is hoped that natural resource management, community empowerment and improving the quality of tourist destinations can create harmonious synergy by optimizing local potential and utilizing digital technology.

### II. THEORETICAL STUDY

This study integrates the concept of sustainable and digitally-based human resource management in the context of developing workforce capacity for the blue economy tourism sector on Mengare Island. This study examines how human resource practices that support employee and environmental well-being, together with the use of digital technology, might enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of tourism management. By focusing on developing the capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector and implementing the principles of the blue economy, this strategy aims to maximize the economic and social benefits of sustainable marine resources.

#### A. Human Resource Management

Dessler (2013) defines human resource management (HRM) as the process of acquiring, training, evaluating, compensating, and considering the interaction between work, health, safety, and justice for employees. Crucial aspects in HRM include job analysis, workforce planning, recruitment, candidate selection, orientation, training, compensation management, incentives, performance

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evaluation, counseling, discipline, development, and employee commitment development. HRM can be used to enhance profitability, as stated by Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene (2018). However, there are challenges related to employee health and work-life balance, as well as external factors like shifting demographics and pressure from stakeholders. These challenges need HR management to adapt in order to achieve optimal performance in the organization.

### **B. Sustainable Human Resources Management**

Ehnert & Harry (2014) define sustainable human resource management as an approach that designs work relationships and contributes to the sustainability of a firm by considering ecological, social, human, and economic objectives. In this regard, the enhancement of employees' capabilities through an effective HRM system, including team-based approaches and continuous training and development, plays a crucial role in economic efficiency. Stahl (2020) asserts that sustainable HRM encompasses strategies and practices oriented towards financial, social, and environmental goals, with a focus on employee welfare, organizational justice, and social dimensions like as distributive and procedural justice. Sustainable HRM use similar principles as HRM in general, such as recruitment, training, performance evaluation, compensation, and job design (2023).

### **C. Digital**

Priyono & Marnis (2008) suggests that the effectiveness of human resource management (HRM) policies can be measured by the extent to which an organization achieves harmony between members, employee commitment to organizational goals, the organization's ability to adapt changes quickly, and the quality of the output produced. In light of the rapid digitalization, all countries, including Indonesia, are required to adapt comprehensively and systematically, promoting the use of digital technology to empower the rural population (Prayuda et al., 2019). Contemporary digital transformation now influences human resource management, with a focus on enhancing the effectiveness and productivity of organizational members (Asari et al., 2023). In their study (Asari et al., 2023) elucidate that the management of human resources through digitalization involves initial stages such as readiness assessment, work framework development, application provision, as well as subsequent stages including implementation readiness, gap analysis, and design refinement.

### **D. Capacity Building**

Capacity, according to the Big Indonesian Dictionary, is defined as available space or capacity time. According to Hitt et al. (2009), resources include inputs in a process such as capital equipment, employee skills, patent rights, finances, and managerial abilities, which are classified as physical, human, and organizational capital. The development of capacity is a concept that describes the ability of an organization to achieve its goals effectively, efficiently, and sustainably (Grindle, 1997). Furthermore, Eade (1997) asserts that capacity building is the primary approach in development to enhance human abilities in determining life priorities and organizing change. The development of human resources capacity has a significant impact on organizations and is crucial for the sustainability of organizational operations (El Mouallem & Analoui, 2014). Horton (2003) defines organizational capacity as the ability to apply skills and resources to achieve goals and meet the expectations of stakeholders. The performance of an organization is influenced by internal, internal, and external capacities.

### **E. Blue Economy**

The concept of the blue economy differs from that of the red economy and green economy in its approach to the utilisation of resources and the environment. The red economy focuses on the exploration of natural resources that invariably harm the environment, while the green economy prioritises alternative energy and environmental sustainability but often requires high costs for infrastructure and technology (Pauli, 2011). The blue economy, as a development of the green economy, aims to create a sustainable economic system based on natural and local principles, with a focus on innovation and entrepreneurship to preserve the vitality of the ecosystem. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) defines the green economy as a carbon-efficient system that is socially inclusive, efficient in resource use, and aims to reduce carbon emissions, pollution, and protect biodiversity and the ecosystem (UNEP, 2024). Green economy supports job and income growth through large investments, the blue economy offers a more affordable alternative, as introduced by Gunter Pauli in his book *The Blue Economy: 10 Years, 100 Innovations, 100 Million Jobs* (2010), which emphasizes entrepreneurship, innovation, and natural principles for building a sustainable economic system (Pauli, 2011).

## **III. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study utilised primary and secondary data as sources of information. The primary data was obtained through interviews with informants, while the secondary data was collected from documents, observations, photographs, and relevant previous research. Technical data collection methods include semi-structured interviews, non-participatory observations, and documentation, which are crucial for ensuring valid and comprehensive data (Sugiyono, 2022). Semi-structured interviews, as a component of the intensive interview technique, enable researchers to explore issues more openly and deeply by listening and recording comments and key informant ideas.

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Data processing implemented using NVIVO 12 PLUS software. Data were analyzed using 5 steps: compiling and preparing the data, reading all the data, coding the data, compiling descriptions/themes, connecting themes/descriptions, and interpreting the meaning of themes (Creswell, 2016).

## **IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This study focuses on developing the human resources capacity in Tanjung Widoro Village, Mengare Island using a sustainable and digital approach. This study integrates recruitment, training, job placement, work environment, and organizational strengthening with principles of sustainable and digital human resource management to support the development of the blue economy tourism area on the island. The objective is to provide a comprehensive picture of strategies to enhance the capacity of local people that can support the management and sustainability of the blue economy tourism on Mengare Island.

### **A. Human Resources for Mengare Mangrove Tourism Management**

The Mengare Mangrove Tourism located in Tanjung Widoro Village, Bungah District, Gresik Regency, East Java, is currently managed by tourism awareness group who also called as POKDARWIS. The Chief is responsible for overall tourism management, including community empowerment and human resources. Under the leadership of the Chief, there is a Department of Water Management responsible for maintaining the cleanliness and maintenance of mangrove forests, as well as a Department of General Management responsible for managing the operational management of tourist facilities, including the provision and improvement of tourist facilities.

### **B. Individual Level Capacity Building**

The topics articulated by informants pertained to individual-level capacity development, encompassing training, compensation, work environment, and recruitment. Training is the primary emphasis, highlighting the significant necessity for enhancing HR skills and competences. The work environment mentioned by many respondents indicated their recognition of the significance of a climate conducive to enhancing human resource capacity. Numerous informants discussed wages, highlighting that equitable salary and remuneration were deemed crucial for enhancing HR competence. Informants briefly addressed the issue of recruiting, noting that the recruitment process remains underutilized in Mengare mangrove tourism. Recruitment is crucial since it generates high-capacity human resources through effective processes.

Recruitment in mangrove tourism Put more emphasis on individual selection with environmental competence to support the development of human and pariwisata resources in accordance with capacity growth (Grindle, 1997; Horton et al., 2003). This environmental competency supports the blue economy theory and the ongoing development of the marine ecosystem (Cabral & Dhar, 2021; Godfrey, 2016; Pauli, 2017). This also has an impact on social progress and the development of tourism (Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene, 2018; Vu et al., 2024).

Grindle (1997) and Horton et al. (2003) have emphasized the importance of continuing education in various fields, including environmental management, public administration, digital technology, and disaster mitigation, in order to increase the capacity of the human population. This study aims to promote local economic growth by addressing the marine ecosystem, in accordance with the blue economy theory (Godfrey, 2016) and the significance of environmental competence (Cabral & Dhar, 2021; Mahdy et al., 2023). In addition, digital training enhances the efficiency of organizational management and the collaboration of key personnel (Asari et al., 2023; Shih, 2024), as well as risk mitigation to ensure the safety of the workforce (Leka et al., 2022).

Remuneration for employees at the Mengare mangrove ecotourism is carried out based on the contribution and responsibility of the chief, with a profit sharing system from visitor income which is distributed transparently. Although inconsistent, this transparency aims to improve motivation and service (Ehnert & Harry, 2014; Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene, 2018). Fair and transparent remuneration is a crucial element in developing human resource capacity and improving performance (Fitriani & Ridwan, 2023; Grindle, 1997).

Supportive and adaptable working environments in Mengare mangrove tourism are essential for sustaining managerial motivation and performance. The sustainable human resource management theory of Stahl et al. (2020) and Grindle's (1997) capacity development theory underscore the significance of a positive work environment for enduring performance (Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene, 2018). An optimal work environment characterized by flexible work arrangements can assist managers in achieving a balance between professional and personal life, consequently alleviating stress (Nabilah & Ridwan, 2022).

Training is a crucial element in the development of Mengare mangrove tourism, including administrative management, finance, marketing, and technical skills such as mangrove literacy, tourist services, and natural disaster mitigation. Digital technology plays a crucial role in increasing training efficiency, providing access to the knowledge and skills needed to support the blue economy. Utilising digital technology in the development of micro, small, and medium enterprises (SME) through e-commerce and digital marketing can expand the market and enhance the residual value of local products. A digital-based recruitment approach ensures effective and fair selection, with competence in caring for the environment and equality. Digital systems for collection and communication support transparency and provide a conducive work environment, thereby enhancing the performance of tourism

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management. The recruitment process at Mengare mangrove tourist site focuses on selecting individuals who are competent and environmentally concerned, in line with capacity development Grindle (1997) and Horton et al. (2003) views on individual contributions to organizational capacity, as well as the concept of blue economy (Cabral & Dhar, 2021; Godfrey, 2016; Mahdy et al., 2023; Pauli, 2011, 2017).

### **C. Organizational Level Capacity Building**

The topics articulated by informants pertained to capacity development at the organizational level, encompassing leadership, organizational structure, human resource empowerment, organizational culture, and incentives. Several respondents emphasized the issue of leadership, indicating that local leadership is deemed crucial for enhancing human resource capacity. Several informants emphasized the issue of organizational structure, acknowledging its significance in reinforcing the organization through clarity and organization. The issue of HR empowerment is frequently addressed by many informants, suggesting its significance as a crucial component in enhancing organizational strength. Numerous informants emphasized the issue of organizational culture, emphasizing that a robust and positive organizational culture is essential for success. A few informants emphasized the issue of incentives, noting that their provision had not been incorporated into the management of mangrove tourism in Tanjung Widoro Village, Mengare Island. Equitable and transparent incentives are seen essential for employee engagement and performance.

In overseeing mangrove tourism at Tanjung Widoro Village, Mengare Island, the Chief Manager plays a vital role by exhibiting robust local leadership that guides and motivates the staff. Strategic leadership, as emphasized by Grindle (1997), is crucial for the enhancement of organizational capabilities. In accordance with Moscardo (2008) and Vu et al. (2024), local leadership promotes collaboration, cultivates positive relationships, and imparts knowledge to tourists. This leadership style is in accordance with the sustainable human resource management principles outlined by Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene (2018), which emphasize employee collaboration and the pursuit of long-term objectives.

An essential factor for the sustainable administration of Mangrove Tourism in Mengare is its organizational culture, which encompasses values, conventions, and behaviors such as kindness, teamwork, and creativity. The primary responsibility of the Chief Manager is to deliver education to guests with genuine and sincere care, therefore promoting good conduct within the tourism setting (Vu et al., 2024). Furthermore, the Chief Manager devises novel ways to develop attractions that make use of marine resources while minimizing social conflicts, in accordance with the social aspect of the blue economy (Youssef, 2023). Effective and sustainable tourist management is facilitated by this robust organizational culture.

The Chief Manager establishes explicit roles and duties among team members while efficiently managing their activities. Effective capacity development requires a robust organizational structure (Grindle, 1997), characterized by well-defined task allocation and equitable burden (Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene, 2018). It is recommended that future organisational structures incorporate information technology to effectively handle data and enhance marketing efforts (McKinley et al., 2021; Tilley et al., 2024). Integrating blue economy concepts and including local people in operational and decision-making processes is crucial for achieving environmental sustainability and promoting economic prosperity (Lee et al., 2020; Setyawati et al., 2021; Youssef, 2023).

At Mengare Mangrove Tourist Park, there is currently no continuous incentive system, but the management team is striving to provide fair and transparent outcomes to motivate and retain the local community. Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene (2018) argue that fair incentives are crucial for enhancing performance, while Mahdy et al. (2023) highlight the effectiveness of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in strengthening employee commitment and skills through environmental-based rewards. By linking incentives with environmental responsibility, it is possible to motivate environmentally concerned citizens and enhance sustainability (Youssef, 2023).

The Chief perceives frustration due to the suboptimal functioning of the existing system, resulting in work stress that affects the performance of tourist management (Nabilah & Ridwan, 2022). Active involvement of the community and support from the government and private sector are crucial for sustainable tourism development (Mujanah et al., 2023), and enhancing capacity through participant training supports this (Abdullah et al., 2023). The key to sustainability is in clear and focused empowerment of local people in the mangrove ecosystem, in accordance with the concept of the blue economy (Godfrey, 2016; Pauli, 2017; Youssef, 2023). Work flexibility and use of digital technology can enhance the engagement of local communities by enabling them to develop various skills and adapt in preserving mangrove ecosystems (McKinley et al., 2021; Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene, 2018).

### **D. Organizational Level Capacity Building**

Not all informants addressed the theme of institutional reform, suggesting that it is a concept not commonly comprehended by them. Only specific informants directly associated with the management of mangrove tourism in Tanjung Widoro Village, Mengare Island, addressed the issue of institutional transformation. For effective institutional reform to be achieved, active participation and engagement from relevant stakeholders are necessary. Evaluations and suggestions from different perspectives can be acquired from commercial entities, tourists, and the Regional Government. The government support, as indicated in local regulation number 16 of 2013, establishes a robust legal foundation for the administration and advancement of Mengare mangrove tourism, with the aim of maximising the economic, social, and environmental value of this region.

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Implementing a well-organized strategy can yield enduring advantages for the local populations and the surrounding environment. The study conducted by Vu et al. (2024) highlights the significance of stakeholders in guiding sustainable tourist behavior in the context of Mengare mangrove tourism. The study focuses on enhancing the ability of local communities to effectively engage in sustainable management of mangrove tourism. The present study builds upon the work conducted by Yulianita & Romadhon (2020), which explored the implementation of mangrove management institutions as a strategy for promoting Mengare mangrove ecotourism.

### **E. Stakeholders' Contribution**

Stakeholders involved in enhancing human resource capacity including community organizations, educational institutions, business entities, regional governments, and local governments. Industry that contributes through investment and partnerships, as well as Regional Governments that provide financial, coaching and policy support. Village Government plays a role in policy, collaboration and enforcement of regulations, while Educational Institutions contribute through education, innovation, internships and research. Within the management of mangrove tourism on Mengare Island, stakeholders play a crucial role in developing human resources (SDM) to achieve sustainability and local economic improvement. The regional government has implemented a policy to support the development of local residents through education and training, carried out by the Department of Tourism and Creative Economy and the Department of Fisheries in Gresik Regency. This policy reflects the need of enhancing the competence of the community, employees, and managerial personnel in the tourism industry. The implementation of this policy has shown positive results through the provision of financial assistance, technical guidance, and responsive training to local needs. The role of stakeholders aligns with the findings of a study conducted by Mahdy et al. (2023), which indicates that the implementation of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices can enhance environmental awareness and employee skills, therefore supporting organizational sustainability.

Village Owned Enterprises of Tanjung Widoro Village plays a crucial role in empowering Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) to enhance the local economy. Village Owned Enterprises prioritises the empowerment of women to create employment opportunities and enhance household income. The empowerment of women carried out by Village Owned Enterprises supports the findings of Junaid (2021) study, which emphasizes the paramount importance of training and empowerment in tourism management for the local community. The collaboration between local management and business operators for tourism promotion, as presented by the Director of PT. Ecosains Indonesia, demonstrates an effective strategy in dividing tasks for the management and marketing of tourist destinations. This collaboration is in line with research by Abdullah et al. (2023) which emphasizes the significance of collaboration and partner capacity development for more effective tourism management. The implementation of the blue economy principle also refers to the studies conducted by Tlusty et al. (2019) and Setyawati et al. (2021), which demonstrate that the management of marine resources should include ecological and socio-economic sustainability in order to achieve optimal results.

### **F. Digital**

The issue of visitor data collecting was extensively addressed by nearly all informants. According to the majority of interviewees, the management of visitor data is crucial. Most informants addressing the digital marketing issue mentioned that digital marketing training is a crucial component in enhancing human resource capabilities. The issue of social media is somewhat less frequently addressed than other themes. Several informants noted social media, as the marketing of Mengare mangrove tourism is extensively conducted by visitors, necessitating management to enhance their proficiency in social media marketing. Numerous informants who addressed digital literacy emphasized that digital comprehension and education are crucial for human resource development.

Numerous respondents omitted the issue of accessibility, suggesting obstacles or insufficient emphasis on ease of access in the development of human resource capability. The issue of digital administration has been extensively examined, highlighting the significance of administrative elements in enhancing human resource capacity. Digital themes encompass digital administration, digital literacy, digital marketing, websites, accessibility, social media, and visitor data gathering.

The utilization of digital technology in the management of mangrove tourism on Mengare Island plays a crucial role in enhancing operational efficiency, marketing, and human resource capacity development. Digital literacy training allows managers to be more effective in managing data and marketing tourism through digital platforms. Mahdy et al. (2023) assert that Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) can enhance the skills and commitment of managers, pertinent to the digital approach implemented in Mengare. Tilley et al. (2024) and McKinley et al. (2021) underscore the significance of technological adaptation for visitor data management and community participation, aligning with a digital-based human resource development strategy to support blue economy tourism in Mengare.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS**

Enhancing human resource (HR) capability in Tanjung Widoro, Mengare Island, is crucial for the effective management and sustainability of blue economy-oriented tourism in the region. A sustainable and digital methodology in HR management has demonstrated an enhancement in operational and marketing efficiency, concurrently facilitating training and empowering local

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communities. Digital literacy training is essential for managing visitor statistics, administration, and digital marketing, enabling managers to leverage technology to foster local economic development. A human resources development approach that incorporates environmentally-focused competency-based recruitment and enhances organizational structure, alongside openness in the compensation system, guarantees equitable and sustainable empowerment. Assistance from many stakeholders, such as governments, educational institutions, and commercial organizations, is essential for improving the skills and dedication of managers in sustainable tourism management.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

It is advisable to conduct technical training in mangrove maintenance, disaster mitigation, and administrative and financial management to enhance human resource competency. Enhancing the organizational framework through a distinct allocation of responsibilities, governmental and business support to augment tourist attractions, and collaboration with local communities and educational institutions is essential for fortifying human resource development initiatives and promoting environmental sustainability. In addition, exhibitions focused on the environment and mangrove-based MSME products, along with both offline and online tourism campaigns, can enhance the appeal of Mengare Island as a sustainable tourist destination.

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