

# Why do some ICBT initiatives survive and fail? Insights from Indigenous Governance in Indonesia

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**Abstract** | This study examines the factors shaping the survivability of Indigenous Community-Based Tourism (ICBT) initiatives in Fatumnasi, Indonesia, emphasising governance practices, cultural integration, and collaborative partnerships. Employing a qualitative, multiple-case study approach, it categorises ICBT survivability into three levels: non-survivability, limited survivability, and full-scale survivability. Key findings highlight localised capacity-building, inclusive decision-making, transparent benefit accountability, and consistent external support as critical for survivability. Cultural values such as *Naketi* (customary deliberation), *Ume Kbubu* (solidarity), and spiritual beliefs in *Uis Neno* (Sky Ruler) and *Uis Pah* (Earth Ruler) foster trust, collective responsibility, and resilience. This research bridges gaps in Community-Based Tourism (CBT) literature by showcasing how Indigenous governance and participatory mechanisms address challenges in culturally rich but economically vulnerable contexts. It offers theoretical advancements and practical guidance for integrating Indigenous traditions, equity-focused governance, and community empowerment into sustainable tourism models, providing actionable insights for global policymakers and practitioners.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, rural Indigenous communities have faced increasing challenges in balancing tourism-driven economic growth with the preservation of cultural identity and customary governance systems (Andung et al., 2023). Global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and shifting travel behaviours have exposed the fragility of tourism-dependent livelihoods and underscored the urgent need for more resilient, culturally grounded tourism models. While tourism accounted for 10.4% of global GDP and 10% of employment in 2019 (Niñerola et al., 2019), its benefits remain unevenly distributed, raising critical concerns about sustainability in Indigenous territories with limited institutional and financial resilience (Zielinski et al., 2020).

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as one strategy to empower local communities through inclusive participation (Giampiccoli et al., 2023). It emphasises local ownership, equitable benefit-sharing, and environmental sustainability (Boronyak et al., 2010; Mercado et al., 2023) and is often promoted as part of sustainable development strategies in the Global South.

However, scholars increasingly differentiate between generic CBT and Indigenous Community-Based Tourism (ICBT), a culturally specific variant that centres on Indigenous leadership and worldview. ICBT is initiated, owned, and governed by Indigenous communities and is grounded in spiritual relationships to land, ancestral stewardship, and customary governance (Andung et al., 2023; Carr et al., 2016). This form of tourism uniquely prioritises cultural sovereignty and Indigenous self-determination, with distinct ontologies that shape planning, identity, and land management (Butler & Hinch, 2007; Scherrer & Doohan, 2013).

Despite the promise of CBT as a tool for empowerment, much of the literature still focuses on generic rural contexts and technical or institutional challenges (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016). These studies often emphasise fragmentation, economic vulnerability, and weak participation. Few studies account for Indigenous authority structures and cosmological worldviews, leaving a research gap on how cultural governance shapes the survivability of tourism initiatives.

This study addresses that gap by asking why some ICBT initiatives in Fatumnasi, Indonesia, survive while others fail under similar socio-cultural and institutional conditions. Fatumnasi,

located in the ancestral territory of the Mollo people, a sub-group of the Dawan ethnic community, offers a compelling case for examining ICBT resilience (Windi & Whittaker, 2012). The research investigates how cultural governance systems, Indigenous values, and collaboration patterns influence survivability under resource constraints and shifting governance regimes.

Indonesia's Sustainable Tourism Development Roadmap (2021–2030) emphasises CBT to reduce rural disparities. However, economic fluctuations, social inequalities, and administrative limitations challenge its long-term sustainability (Ahsani et al., 2022; Mervelito et al., 2020). These dynamics highlight the urgency of research on how CBT adapts and builds resilience in changing socio-economic contexts.

Fatumnasi is particularly relevant due to its ecological richness and cultural resilience. It lies within Mollo ancestral territory, where Mount Mutis and the Ampupu forest are sacred landscapes central to spiritual and territorial identity (Ola, 2017; Pellondou & Titaley, 2021). Recognising this potential, the provincial government designated Fatumnasi as a “new tourism estate” aligned with green economy principles (Laiskodat, 2021). Mollo cosmology, rooted in reverence for *Uis Neno* (Sky Lord) and *Uis Pah* (Earth Lord), informs conservation ethics and solidarity, enacted through *Naketi* (customary deliberation) and symbolised by the *Ume Kbubu*, a traditional house reflecting unity and lineage (Afi & Banamtuan, 2020; Liubana & Nenohai, 2021).

Nevertheless, not all ICBT sites share the same outcomes. While some, such as Nefo Kaenka Lake, benefit from cohesive leadership and transparent reinvestment, others falter due to weak collaboration and limited accountability. This variation highlights the importance of examining how Indigenous governance and cultural practices shape community survivability.

In this study, cultural governance refers to rules and practices rooted in Indigenous traditions that guide decision-making and conflict resolution (Su & Cai, 2019; Yan & Liu, 2023). Resilience denotes the community's capacity to adapt to socio-economic and environmental challenges while preserving cultural identity and tourism livelihoods (Nguyen & Akerkar, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). In Fatumnasi, values such as *Naketi* (deliberation), *Nono* (kinship solidarity), *Ume Kbubu* (family unity), and *Meup Tabua* (collective work) function as institutions supporting inclusivity, shared power, and communal responsibility (Benu, 2022; Gana et al., 2022). Nevertheless, survivability differs across sites: Nefo Kaenka Lake thrives

through strong customary governance, while others struggle due to weak leadership and limited reinvestment.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it shifts the focus from short-term financial or ecological gains toward institutional and cultural factors enabling long-term survivability (Hamzah, 2014; Raftopoulos, 2020). Second, it introduces a “cultural governance” perspective linking Indigenous traditions with adaptive tourism management. Third, positioning Fatumnasi as a case study offers empirical insights into power-sharing, collaboration, and socio-cultural resilience, with lessons for policymakers and practitioners.

Overall, this study advances debates on adaptive governance and Indigenous resilience. It theoretically contributes by embedding cultural governance into tourism studies and offering recommendations for sustainable community-driven initiatives.

The article is structured as follows: a literature review, methodology, results, discussion, limitations, and conclusions.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Community-Based Tourism balances economic, social, and environmental goals (Dodds et al., 2018; Strydom et al., 2019). In developing contexts, it is promoted as a tool for local independence through inclusive governance (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Giampiccoli et al., 2021). Nevertheless, long-term success requires governance models that ensure adaptability, participation, and resilience rather than focusing solely on sustainability in normative or economic terms.

This study employs the concept of survivability, defined as the capacity of CBT initiatives to remain operational, adapt to change, and deliver continuous socio-economic and environmental benefits (Ngo & Creutz, 2022). Survivability differs from sustainability, which emphasises stability, and viability, which focuses narrowly on financial feasibility. It highlights the struggle of Indigenous and marginalised communities to persist amid structural constraints such as resource scarcity, institutional fragility, and political exclusion (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2021).

Two complementary perspectives, adaptive governance and cultural governance, frame this analysis. Adaptive governance stresses flexible and inclusive networks that enable shared learning and negotiation (Islam et al., 2018; Y. Su et al., 2022). Cultural governance, rooted in traditions, reinforces resilience through norms of consensus, reciprocity, and communal labour

(Stone & Stone, 2020). Although central to Indigenous tourism, cultural values remain less explored in CBT scholarship than economic or ecological impacts (Hamzah, 2014; Raftopoulos, 2020).

In this context, Indigenous resilience refers to the ability of communities to sustain and adapt cultural, social, and economic systems while preserving identity and autonomy (Bayrak, 2022; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). It involves resisting disruption and regenerating through customary law, spirituality, and local knowledge. Linking adaptive governance with Indigenous resilience provides a framework for understanding how culturally grounded CBT strengthens institutional capacity, community empowerment, and long-term viability.

Economic and social benefits also reinforce CBT survivability. Increased community income, cultural preservation, and reinvestment in local infrastructure strengthen solidarity and commitment (Ngo & Creutz, 2022). Perceptions of tangible benefits influence community participation, as residents remain engaged when outcomes are visible (Miller et al., 2010; Sousa et al., 2021). However, these benefits must be embedded in inclusive governance to avoid “participatory capture,” where a few monopolise control.

Finally, collaborative partnerships between governments, private actors, and local communities are essential for resource mobilisation, market access, and policy implementation (Jones et al., 2017; Tasci et al., 2014). Effective partnerships foster accountability and shared responsibility, while power asymmetries can marginalise local voices. Adaptive governance addresses this risk by ensuring transparency and inclusivity, enabling CBT governance to remain responsive to community needs while balancing external interests (Islam et al., 2018).

### **3. Methods**

This study employed a multiple case study approach to analyse factors shaping ICBT survivability across diverse contexts (Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2017). The method identified patterns and relationships within and between cases, offering a robust analytical framework (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). It also supported comparative analysis, revealing shared and divergent conditions, and contributed to a broader theoretical understanding of ICBT survivability (Yin, 2018).

#### **Research Context**

The research was conducted in Fatumnasi, a culturally rich highland area in South-Central Timor, Indonesia, where ICBT management faces both opportunities and challenges. The

region is home to attractions such as Mount Mutis and the Ampupu Forest, which offer significant tourism potential but also generate conflicts among village governments, forestry agencies, and tourism authorities. Local values, such as *Ume Kbbubu* (solidarity), *Meup Onle Ate* and *Tah Onle Usif* (work with heart, serve with respect), and *Meup Tabua* (collective labour), inform governance practices and guide infrastructure development. Spiritual beliefs in *Uis Neno* (Sky Lord) and *Uis Pah* (Earth Lord) further reinforce these cultural foundations and continue to shape conservation practices and social cohesion.

These cultural principles are embedded in everyday community life and become visible in tourism practices. At Nefo Kaenka Lake, for example, youth welcome visitors with traditional dances, while elders conduct *Naketi*, a consensus-building practice, under eucalyptus trees. Women prepare cassava-based meals, creating a hospitable atmosphere rooted in ancestral traditions and communal solidarity. Such practices illustrate how tourism in Fatumnasi integrates economic activity with the continuation of cultural identity.

In Fatumnasi Village, the case of Mama Lodya's Strawberry Farm highlights another mode of participation, where agricultural livelihoods intersect with tourism. Her direct involvement in guiding visitors and narrating cultural values shows how tourism is economic and an expression of heritage and stewardship. Together with Nefo Kaenka Lake, such examples demonstrate that ICBT in Fatumnasi is grounded in daily interaction, hospitality, and spiritual reverence practices. A map of Fatumnasi is presented in Figure 1 to aid spatial understanding.



Figure 1. Natural Tourism Map of Fatumnasi

Source: South Central Timor Local Government, 2025

## Case Selection

The study examines six CBT sites (Table 1) selected on three grounds: active implementation of ICBT, diversity of capacities and geographic contexts, and exposure to local political dynamics. Fatumnasi in eastern Indonesia, for instance, faces greater financial and human resource constraints than western cases (Oematan et al., 2022). Leadership capacity and internal competition further shape decision-making and governance stability. This selection enables a nuanced analysis of how socio-cultural, economic, and political factors influence ICBT sustainability across contexts.

Table 1. *Research Cases*

CBT/Type	Purpose	Stakeholders	Established
Nefokaenka Lake, Fatukoto	Promote eco-tourism through fishing, camping, and boating, empowering local communities.	Local community (Pokdarwis Taheunpah), Bank NTT, NGOs, private sector, local government, leaders.	2018
Mutis Lodge, Fatumnasi	Provide accommodations and cultural learning experiences in traditional Fatumnasi houses.	Local community, cultural leaders, local government, tourism office, academics.	2015
Mama Lodya's Strawberry Farm	Combine strawberry farming with agro-tourism to attract visitors.	Local community, farmers' groups, local government, private sector, community cooperatives.	2017
Forestry Siblings Booth, Eon Besi	Offer resting areas for travelers, promote local products, and support eco-tourism.	Local community, forestry office, local government, NGOs, community leaders.	2019
Marble Hill, Fatukoto	Showcase unique marble formations as a geological tourism attraction.	Local community, geologists, local government, tourism office, academics.	2016
Paradise Park Post, Oelbubuk	Promote cultural and eco-tourism and support local economic empowerment through craft training.	Local community, GMIT church, DPRD members, local government, NGOs.	2020

*Source:* Primary Data, 2024

## Sampling method

This study applied purposive sampling to select 40 informants directly involved in ICBT management, either as implementers or beneficiaries (Campbell et al., 2020). Participants included decision-makers, traditional and community leaders, and government officials, chosen

for their experience with governance, conflict, and sustainability issues. The sample represented diverse sites and management contexts, ensuring varied perspectives aligned with the study's objectives. Data collection continued until saturation, providing a robust basis for analysing ICBT challenges and opportunities (Boddy, 2016; Fusch & Ness, 2015). As detailed in Table 2, the informants were distributed across different CBT sites and institutional affiliations, reflecting a broad range of roles and perspectives.

Table 2: *Informants by CBT Site and Institutional Affiliation*

<b>CBT Site &amp; Location</b>	<b>Informant Category</b>	<b>Position/Role</b>	<b>Number of Informants</b>
Nefo Kaenka Lake, Fatukoto Village	Community Members	Local Entrepreneurs (Pokdarwis Taheunpah)	7
	Tourists	Domestic and International Visitors	3
<b>Subtotal (Nefo Kaenka Lake)</b>			<b>10</b>
Mutis Lodge, Fatumnasi Village	Community Members	Cultural Leader & Business Owner	1
	Tourists	Visitors staying at or touring through lodge	2
<b>Subtotal (Mutis Lodge)</b>			<b>3</b>
Mama Lodya's Strawberry Farm, Fatumnasi Village	Community Members	Local Entrepreneurs (Strawberry Farmers)	2
	Tourists	Visitors participating in agro-tourism	2
<b>Subtotal (Mama Lodya's Strawberry Farm)</b>			<b>4</b>
Forestry Siblings Booth, Eon Besi Village	Community Members	Village Head	2
	Community Members	Local Entrepreneurs (Rest Stop Vendors)	4
	Tourists	Walk-in Visitors at Booth Area	1
<b>Subtotal (Forestry Siblings Booth)</b>			<b>7</b>
Marble Hill, Fatukoto Village	Community Members	Village Head	2
	Community Members	Local Entrepreneurs (Guides, Product Sellers)	3
	Tourists	Domestic Tourists	1

<b>Subtotal (Marble Hill)</b>			<b>6</b>
Paradise Park Post, Oelbubuk Village	Community Members	Community Observers (no direct operator active)	2
	Tourists	Former Visitors	1
<b>Subtotal (Paradise Park Post)</b>			<b>3</b>
Local Government and Institutional Stakeholders	Government Officials	Tourism Office (District Level)	4
	Government Officials	<b>BBKSDA</b> – <i>Balai Besar Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam / Natural Resource Conservation Agency</i>	2
	Government Officials	<b>UPTD KPH</b> – <i>Kesatuan Pengelolaan Hutan / Forest Management Unit</i>	2
	Government Officials	<b>PMD</b> – <i>Pemberdayaan Masyarakat dan Desa / Community Empowerment Agency</i>	2
<b>Subtotal (Government &amp; Institutions)</b>			<b>10</b>
<b>Total Informants</b>			<b>40</b>

Source: Primary Data, 2024

### Data Collection and analysis

This study employed qualitative content analysis to examine ICBT survivability in Fatumnasi (Assarroudi et al., 2018). Fieldwork from June to December 2024 combined semi-structured interviews with 40 stakeholders (CBT managers, village heads, cultural leaders, government officials, and tourists), participatory observation at six sites, and analysis of tourism plans, financial records, and policy documents. Data focused on governance, participation, cultural integration, economic outcomes, and external support. They were analysed using Miles et al.'s (2014) condensation, display, and conclusion drawing framework, with NVivo 12 supporting coding and thematic mapping. Triangulation across sources enhanced validity, while ethical standards were upheld through institutional approval, informed consent, and confidentiality safeguards. NVivo also ensured transparency and auditability, enabling the study to generate robust insights into resilience, equity, adaptive governance, and the overall survivability of ICBT initiatives.

## 4. Results

This study categorises ICBT survivability in Fatumnasi into three levels: non-survivability, limited survivability, and full-scale survivability, defined as the capacity to persist, adapt, and remain relevant despite institutional, socio-political, and resource constraints (Savaya & Spiro, 2012; Stirman et al., 2012). Unlike “sustainability,” which assumes stability, survivability emphasises adaptive strategies enabling communities to endure volatility and governance fragmentation. Six CBT sites illustrate this spectrum: Nefo Kaenka Lake (eco-tourism), Mutis Lodge (cultural heritage), Mama Lodya’s Strawberry Farm (agro-tourism), Forestry Siblings Booth (roadside services), Marble Hill (geo-tourism), and Paradise Park Post (inactive cultural-eco tourism). The cases show that survivability rests not only on tourism potential or external support but also on governance quality, equitable benefit-sharing, and integrating cultural assets into tourism systems.

### ICBT Survivability Conditions

This study categorises ICBT survivability in Fatumnasi into non-survivability, limited survivability, and full-scale survivability. The framework integrates concepts of project sustainability, participatory governance, community resilience, and collaborative networks, using four criteria: operational continuity (Stirman et al., 2012), community participation (Arnstein, 2019), economic benefit (Ngo & Creutz, 2022), and stakeholder collaboration (Emerson et al., 2012).

Non-survivability, as in Paradise Park Post, reflects structural weaknesses, such as expired land leases, lack of ownership, and absent governance, leading to collapse. As exemplified by Mama Lodya’s Strawberry Farm and Marble Hill, limited survivability shows symbolic participation, stagnant revenues, weak leadership, and fragmented collaboration. Full-scale survivability, represented by Nefo Kaenka Lake, demonstrates consistent operations, tangible economic returns, inclusive governance, and strong partnerships.

What distinguishes Nefo Kaenka Lake is the institutionalisation of cultural practices like *Naketi* (customary deliberation), transparent reinvestment of tourism income in community projects, and publicly disclosed financial decisions that build trust and accountability. Unlike sporadic or undefined partnerships elsewhere, it also benefits from durable collaborations with government, NGOs, and private partners. Figure 2 demonstrates that the interconnected

elements of cultural governance, transparent reinvestment, and adaptive collaboration collectively influence the trajectory of CBT survivability. These factors position Nefo Kaenka Lake within the full-scale survivability condition. Furthermore, these features define full-scale survivability and underscore the conditions required for the long-term resilience of ICBT initiatives.




Non-survived ICBT	Survived ICBT (Limited Scale)	Survived ICBT (Full Scale)
<div data-bbox="252 801 435 920" style="border: 1px solid gray; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <b>Paradise Park Post</b> </div> <div data-bbox="188 943 501 1093" style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">  <p>It was discontinued due to the expiration of the land lease and a lack of community integration</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="536 790 783 920" style="border: 1px solid gray; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <b>Mama Lodya's Strawberry Farm and Mutis Lodge</b> </div> <div data-bbox="794 790 1031 920" style="border: 1px solid gray; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <b>Forestry Siblings Booth and Marble Hill (Fatunausus)</b> </div> <div data-bbox="635 943 963 1070" style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">  <p>Operations are sporadic with low tourist turnout</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="1129 790 1329 904" style="border: 1px solid gray; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <b>Nefokaenka Lake</b> </div> <div data-bbox="1094 943 1407 1077" style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">  <p>Fully integrated, with stable visitation and positive economic impact</p> </div>

Figure 2. The fate of CBT Survivability Condition  
 Source: Author's construct, 2024

### Critical Factors for the Survivability of CBT

This study identifies four key dimensions shaping the survivability of ICBT in Fatumnasi: participation and empowerment, cultural governance, perceived benefits (economic, social, and sustainability), and Collaborative partnerships. These interconnected dimensions highlight the internal and external factors driving ICBT sustainability (Figure 3).

**Empowerment and participation**

- Training fosters management independence.
- Clearly defined roles enhance accountability and operational clarity.
- Inclusive decision-making fosters trust and community ownership.
- Transparent benefit accountability fosters community trust and long-term engagement.

**Cultural Governance**

- Tradition-based governance strengthens community cohesion and operational resilience
- Spiritual beliefs enhance resource stewardship and long-term commitment to sustainability.
- Integration of cultural traditions fosters collaboration and shared responsibility
- Inclusive decision-making fosters trust and strengthens community ownership

**Perception of economic, social, and sustainability benefits:**

- Transparent reinvestment strengthens trust, collective ownership, and long-term sustainability.
- Equitable economic benefits sustain participation and foster community commitment.
- Alignment with community aspirations enhances trust, social cohesion, and broader participation.

**Collaborative Partnership**

- Multi-stakeholder collaboration fosters shared responsibility, resource optimisation, and governance stability.
- Balanced power enhances trust, participation, and equitable governance.
- Adaptive governance ensures flexibility, shared accountability, and responsiveness to socio-economic challenges.

Figure 3. Critical Factors in the CBT Survivability in Indigenous Communities

Source: Author's construct, 2024

### ***Empowerment and Participation in ICBT Sustainability***

Community empowerment and active participation are fundamental dimensions shaping the survivability of ICBT initiatives in Fatumnasi. These factors directly influence governance practices, community ownership, and operational sustainability, forming critical foundations for long-term tourism development. Drawing on Arnstein's (2019) Ladder of Participation, this study analyses how varying levels of community involvement in decision-making correlate with the success or failure of different CBT initiatives.

Empirical evidence shows distinct patterns along Arnstein's continuum of participation. Nefo Kaenka Lake, a full-scale survivability case, reflects delegated power and citizen control, with community members holding governance roles and making decisions through *Naketi*, which "ensures everyone's voice is heard, and responsibilities are shared" (Informants 3, 9, 12, 18).

Mama Lodya's Strawberry Farm demonstrates tokenism, where decisions rest with a few individuals and consultation lacks authority. At the same time, Paradise Park Post exemplifies non-participation, with most residents excluded from decision-making before its collapse (Informants 6, 7, 13). These comparisons highlight that deeper, institutionalised participation strengthens resilience and sustains tourism outcomes, confirming the significance of advancing Arnstein's ladder in Indigenous contexts.

This study found four interrelated factors, namely localised capacity-building, active role differentiation, inclusive decision-making processes, and transparent benefit accountability emerged as significant drivers in ICBT outcomes.

The first factor, localised capacity-building, empowers communities to manage tourism resources effectively and independently. At Nefo Kaenka Lake, tailored training programs in bookkeeping, guest reception, tour guiding, and digital marketing, facilitated by local Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the District Tourism Office, and Bank NTT, were designed through community consultations to meet local needs. These initiatives enabled residents to transition from passive consultation to active governance roles, assuming responsibilities as treasurer, operations coordinator, and event planner. In doing so, community members moved their participation beyond consultation to delegated power, strengthening local capacity and institutionalising shared governance, as defined by Arnstein's (2019) Ladder of Participation. One informant shared: "The training is designed for our specific needs, helping us manage tourism without relying on external help" (Informants 6, 9, 11, and 15). Another added: "These skills have also strengthened our ability to collaborate on other community challenges" (Informants 7, 12, 14, and 16).

In contrast, at Lopo Mutis, capacity-building efforts are minimal, leaving participation at the *informing* stage. Paradise Park Post has no capacity-building programs, reflecting *manipulation* or *non-participation*. These findings emphasise that localised capacity-building enables communities to ascend Arnstein's ladder, fostering self-reliance and resilience essential for CBT development.

The second factor, active role differentiation, fosters accountability and operational clarity. Our study revealed that at Nefo Kaenka Lake, responsibilities such as treasurer, coordinator, and event organiser are systematically assigned, facilitating a shift to *delegated power* on Arnstein's ladder. Informants explained: "Defined roles ensure that everyone knows their responsibilities, making collaboration smoother" (Informants 18, 19, 20, and 21). Another added that "Having

assigned roles motivates participation and prevents conflicts over tasks” (Informants 22, 24, 26, and 28).

At Marble Hill, unclear role differentiation reduces participation to mere informing, while Paradise Park Post reflects non-participation due to the absence of defined roles, weakening governance. In contrast, Nefo Kaenka Lake demonstrates inclusive decision-making grounded in *Naketi* (customary deliberation), where forums ensure collective priorities are represented. One informant noted, “The open discussions ensure everyone’s voice is heard, and the outcomes align with our community’s needs” (Informants 3, 5, 9, and 12). Another emphasised, “This inclusivity strengthens our unity and ensures we all take responsibility for decisions” (Informants 7, 10, 15, and 18). Meanwhile, Mama Lodya’s Strawberry Farm shows unilateral decision-making that limits participation to tokenism. These findings highlight that inclusive and transparent decision-making fosters trust, unity, and genuine citizen power, whereas its absence relegates communities to symbolic or non-participation.

The fourth factor, transparent benefit accountability, is crucial for sustaining trust and participation. At Nefo Kaenka Lake, annual tourism revenues, estimated at IDR 45–60 million (USD 2,800–3,800), are reinvested in infrastructure such as toilets, footpaths, and campsite facilities, as well as cultural events. A public financial board and monthly community meetings ensure visibility and control over fund allocation. Informant 4 noted, “After we built toilets and improved the path, visitor numbers grew. Everyone sees how the money is used.” Participation in Pokdarwis meetings consistently exceeds 70%, reflecting strong community engagement.

In contrast, Paradise Park Post lacked formal financial reporting. Revenues from early NGOs’ support were managed by a small committee without wider input, leading to disputes, poor turnout (below 20%), and eventual collapse of operations. These cases show that transparent financial governance is essential not just for legitimacy but also for sustaining community-led tourism.

This study categorises the identified factors into three groups based on their influence on survivability: (1) factors that enhance or weaken survivability, such as localised capacity-building and active role differentiation; (2) factors essential for survival, including inclusive decision-making and transparent benefit accountability; and (3) prerequisites for CBT development, such as tailored training programs and structured governance systems. As summarised in Table 3, variations in participation and empowerment, particularly in training, role differentiation, decision-making, and benefit accountability, clearly distinguish full-scale,

limited, and non-survivability conditions. Additionally, inclusivity and transparency in governance processes differentiate initiatives with strong survivability, such as Nefo Kaenka Lake, from those with limited or no survivability, such as Marble Hill and Paradise Park Post. These findings contribute to global CBT literature by emphasising the critical role of empowerment and participation in shaping long-term tourism sustainability, particularly in culturally rich but resource-constrained regions.

Table 3. *Data Construct of Participation and Empowerment Dimension*

No.	Construct	Full-Scale Survivability	Limited Survivability	Non-Survivability	Theme
1	Training	Structured technical and managerial training supports independent management	Training is minimal	No training provided	Structured training enhances independence in tourism management.
2	Role Differentiation	Clearly assigned roles foster accountability and operational efficiency	Role differentiation is unclear, leading to confusion	Roles are not defined, resulting in fragmented efforts	Clearly defined roles enhance accountability and operational clarity.
3	Decision-Making	Inclusive governance forums ensure decisions reflect collective priorities	Decision-making is limited to a few individuals	Decision-making is unilateral, excluding community participation	Inclusive decision-making fosters trust and community ownership.
4	Benefit Accountability	Transparent allocation of tourism revenues to community projects sustains trust	Revenue distribution has limited transparency	Lack of revenue transparency creates mistrust	Transparent benefit accountability fosters community trust and long-term engagement.

Source: Primary Data, 2024

### ***Cultural Governance in ICBT Sustainability***

Cultural governance shapes CBT survivability by embedding indigenous values into governance frameworks, strengthening decision-making, responsibility, and cohesion. At Nefo Kaenka Lake, practices such as *Naketi* (customary deliberation) and *Meup Tabua* (communal

work) foster inclusivity and unity, aligning governance with community values. As Informant 6 explained, “Naketi ensures that decisions are made collectively, giving everyone a voice and building trust.” Likewise, Informant 10 highlighted, “Working together under Meup Tabua strengthens our bonds and helps us achieve our goals as a community.” These traditions promote transparency, trust, and collaboration, creating a resilient governance model distinguishing high-survivability initiatives.

In contrast, these traditions are inconsistently applied at Marble Hill, limiting their impact on decision-making and social cohesion. Informant 9 observed: “We occasionally mention our traditions, but they are not central to how we govern or make decisions”. At Paradise Park Post, where cultural governance is absent, the lack of such practices has resulted in disengagement and operational failure, as noted by Informant 7: “Without using our traditions, there is no unity or shared responsibility in managing the initiative”.

The second factor shaping ICBT survivability is the role of spiritual beliefs in fostering community commitment and stewardship. In Fatumnasi, beliefs in *Uis Neno* (Lord of the Sky) and *Uis Pah* (Lord of the Earth) shape ethical obligations in tourism governance, particularly at Nefo Kaenka Lake. Spiritual values guide conservation practices and strengthen the community's relationship with nature. As Informant 4 explained, “We protect Mount Mutis not just for economic benefits but because it is integral to our spiritual identity.” These beliefs reinforce collective responsibility and long-term commitment to sustainable tourism.

In contrast, Marble Hill and Paradise Park Post lacked spiritual grounding in their governance. Field observations and interviews revealed that informants rarely linked *Uis Neno* or *Uis Pah* to tourism management, and no rituals or symbolic practices accompanied decision-making or conservation. Informant 9 from Marble Hill noted, “We do not have any ceremonies or spiritual rules related to the site; it is mostly seen as a place to show visitors the marble.” At Paradise Park Post, external actors initiated activities with little cultural alignment and no customary leadership, weakening communal responsibility and stewardship. These contrasting cases show that spiritually rooted values directly influence community-based tourism governance's durability and moral legitimacy.

The third factor is culturally inclusive decision-making, which enhances transparency and trust. Our study found that at Nefo Kaenka Lake, inclusive decision-making rooted in *Naketi* ensures that governance reflects community values and priorities. Informant 4 explained: “Through *Naketi*, everyone feels heard, and decisions are accepted because they align with our traditions”.

This inclusivity strengthens trust, ensuring stakeholders feel invested in the initiative's success. Conversely, decision-making processes excluded cultural elements at Mama Lodya's Strawberry Farm, resulting in dissatisfaction and disengagement. Similarly, Paradise Park Post's lack of culturally inclusive governance created mistrust and hindered collaboration, contributing to the initiative's failure.

The findings underscore the transformative role of cultural governance in shaping tourism management through practices such as *Naketi* (deliberation), *Meup Tabua* (communal work), *Feto Mone* (gender cooperation), and spiritual beliefs in *Uis Neno* and *Uis Pah*. These traditions foster trust, collective responsibility, and alignment with community values, providing a foundation for sustainable development. As outlined in Table 4, the presence and consistency of cultural governance practices distinguish varying levels of survivability. Embedding these practices within governance frameworks enables ICBT initiatives to build resilience and preserve cultural heritage. Furthermore, this approach challenges transactional tourism models by positioning CBT as a mechanism to safeguard identity and address global challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss. This culturally grounded strategy contributes to international debates on equity, resilience, and sustainability, and offers a replicable, adaptable framework for diverse contexts.

Table 4. *Data Construct of Cultural Governance*

No.	Construct	Full-Scale Survivability	Limited Survivability	Non-Survivability	Theme
1	Tradition-Based Governance	<i>Naketi</i> (customary deliberation) fosters inclusive decision-making and trust.	Traditions are inconsistently applied, limiting their governance impact.	Absence of cultural governance results in disengagement and operational failure.	Tradition-based governance strengthens community cohesion and operational resilience.
2	Spiritual Integration	Beliefs in <i>Uis Neno</i> and <i>Uis Pah</i> guide conservation and moral stewardship.	Weak integration of spiritual beliefs reduces long-term commitment.	Lack of spiritual values undermines shared responsibility and resource stewardship.	Spiritual beliefs enhance resource stewardship and long-term commitment to sustainability.

3	Cultural Integration	Practices like <i>Meup Tabua</i> (communal work) promote unity and collaboration.	Cultural traditions are occasionally referenced but lack consistent application.	Cultural practices are entirely absent, weakening trust and engagement.	Integration of cultural traditions fosters collaboration and shared responsibility.
4	Inclusive Decision-Making	Governance forums rooted in <i>Naketi</i> ensure inclusivity and transparency.	Decision-making excludes some stakeholders, weakening cohesion.	Governance excludes cultural elements, creating mistrust and disengagement.	Inclusive decision-making fosters trust and strengthens community ownership.

Source: Primary Data, 2024

### ***Economic, Social, and Sustainability Benefits in ICBT Initiatives***

Economic and social benefits are critical dimensions influencing the survivability of ICBT initiatives. These benefits shape community support, stakeholder engagement, and the operational sustainability of tourism ventures. In Fatumnasi, economic and social benefits play a decisive role in determining the varying levels of ICBT survivability, ranging from non-survivability to full-scale survivability. This study explores these dimensions, focusing on how they foster collective ownership, align tourism development with local aspirations, and influence long-term sustainability.

The first factor is the reinvestment of tourism-generated revenue into community-driven priorities. Our study found that at Nefo Kaenka Lake, a full-scale survivability initiative, revenue is consistently reinvested in projects, such as infrastructure development, community facilities, and education programs. Informants emphasised that this reinvestment practice motivates greater community involvement by demonstrating tangible, collective benefits. Participants explained, "Tourism revenue funds essential projects, from improving roads to supporting community programs, making us feel proud and encouraging us to stay involved" (Informants 4, 6, 7, and 9). Another added, "Visible improvements, such as better facilities and social activities, strengthen trust and participation" (Informants 10, 12, 13, and 15).

While reinvestment of revenue is a practice found in Indigenous and non-Indigenous community-based tourism models globally, what distinguishes its application in Nefo Kaenka Lake is the strong linkage to Indigenous norms of collective benefit and customary consensus. In this context, reinvestment decisions are not made through formal budgeting processes alone but through *Naketi*. This traditional deliberative practice reflects the community's cultural

emphasis on inclusivity, obligation to others (*nono*), and ancestral stewardship (*Uis Pah* and *Uis Neno*). Therefore, although the reinvestment mechanism may be universal, its embeddedness in Indigenous governance values makes it culturally specific in form and function.

Conversely, our findings revealed that trust erodes at initiatives like Mama Lodya's Strawberry Farm, where revenue reinvestment is minimal or absent, leading to disengagement and weaker sustainability. Several informants noted the lack of visible benefits, with one stating that "When there are no clear improvements or benefits, people stop supporting the initiative" (Informants 6, 9, 11, and 14). These findings highlight that transparent and participatory reinvestment creates a virtuous cycle of trust and engagement, which is essential for long-term sustainability.

The second factor is the provision of direct economic benefits to community members, which sustains commitment and participation. Our study revealed that at Nefo Kaenka Lake, tourism activities generate meaningful economic opportunities, including employment and support for local businesses. Informants collectively emphasised the importance of these opportunities, with several participants stating that "Tourism provides income through jobs and local business ventures, which supports families and motivates us to contribute more" (Informants 3, 5, 7, and 12).

In contrast, at Mama Lodya's Strawberry Farm, limited economic opportunities contribute to community disengagement and dissatisfaction. Informants observed that the initiative provides few direct employment opportunities, which weakens its perceived value among residents. This limitation is largely due to the small operational scale of the project, which is centred around a modest strawberry cultivation area with minimal infrastructure and visitor capacity. The tourism model implemented, primarily self-guided farm visits and basic product sampling, requires only a handful of staff for maintenance and occasional guest handling, resulting in a narrow distribution of economic benefits.

Several informants explained, "With few jobs or income from tourism, people don't see the point in supporting it" (Informants 6, 9, 11, and 14). These findings suggest that community-based tourism projects may struggle to generate widespread economic inclusion without sufficient scale or diversification of tourism services, such as guided tours, hospitality facilities, or value-added product experiences. Equitable and scalable benefit-sharing mechanisms are critical to sustaining long-term community engagement and support.

The third factor is the alignment of tourism development with local aspirations and cultural values. At Nefo Kaenka Lake, initiatives are designed to support community priorities such as infrastructure, education, and artistic preservation, with participants noting that “Tourism helps us achieve our priorities, like better infrastructure and preserving traditions, which keeps everyone motivated” (Informants 2, 6, 8, 12). In contrast, Mama Lodya’s Strawberry Farm shows weak alignment, as informants reported unmet needs for stable jobs, diversified livelihoods, and improved access roads or clean water, with the project focusing narrowly on agro-tourism without integrating complementary services to enhance community benefit.

Informants expressed that the farm’s activities were limited in scope and did not offer long-term income-generating opportunities. As Informants 7, 10, 14, and 16 explained: “When initiatives don not address what we need, people lose interest and stop participating.” These findings indicate that for Indigenous Community-Based Tourism (ICBT) to be sustainable, projects must be rooted not only in cultural or ecological potential but also in the lived socioeconomic priorities of the community. Failure to reflect these priorities weakens collective ownership, undermines motivation, and jeopardises long-term sustainability.

These findings advance the community-based tourism (CBT) literature by demonstrating that economic and social benefits foster trust, engagement, and long-term sustainability. Instead of focusing exclusively on financial returns, this study highlights the significance of reinvestment and alignment with community priorities, as evidenced at Nefo Kaenka Lake. This approach directly addresses critiques related to unequal benefit distribution and superficial participation. As summarised in Table 5, variations in reinvestment, economic benefits, and alignment with community aspirations result in differing survivability outcomes. By challenging profit-oriented paradigms, CBT is positioned as a mechanism for inclusive development, where equitable benefit-sharing and reinvestment empower communities, enhance socio-economic resilience, and establish sustainable growth pathways. This perspective contributes to global debates on sustainable tourism governance by providing adaptable strategies to reduce disparities and promote equity across diverse contexts.

Table 5. Data Construct of Perceptions of Economic, Social, and Sustainability Benefits

No.	Construct	Full-Scale Survivability	Limited Survivability	Non-Survivability	Theme
1	Reinvestment of Revenue	Revenue is transparently reinvested in infrastructure, community facilities, and education programs.	Limited reinvestment reduces visible community benefits.	No reinvestment leads to disengagement and mistrust.	Transparent reinvestment strengthens trust, collective ownership, and long-term sustainability.
2	Economic Benefits	Tourism generates employment opportunities and supports local businesses, fostering economic inclusion.	Economic benefits are limited and unevenly distributed.	Lack of direct economic benefits results in community disengagement.	Equitable economic benefits sustain participation and foster community commitment.
3	Alignment with Aspirations	Tourism development aligns with community goals, such as cultural preservation and infrastructure improvements.	Limited alignment weakens relevance and engagement.	Tourism projects fail to address community priorities, causing disengagement.	Alignment with community aspirations enhances trust, social cohesion, and broader participation.

Source: Primary Data, 2024

### Collaborative Partnerships in ICBT Initiatives

Collaborative partnerships are pivotal to the survivability of ICBT initiatives, optimising resource allocation, strengthening governance, and ensuring effective policy implementation. Partnerships between governments, private sectors, and local communities form the backbone of sustainable tourism governance by fostering trust, inclusivity, and operational efficiency. This study examines how collaborative partnerships influence the survivability of ICBT initiatives in Fatumnasi, highlighting their interdependence and varying effectiveness across full-scale, limited, and non-survivability conditions.

The first factor is establishing multi-stakeholder collaboration, which ensures equitable roles and responsibilities among governments, private sectors, and local communities. This study revealed that at Nefo Kaenka Lake, robust partnerships with various institutions, particularly Bank NTT (Bank Pembangunan Daerah Nusa Tenggara Timur) and district-level tourism

authorities, have provided critical financial, technical, and regulatory support that enhances governance and operational sustainability.

Each partner plays a distinct and complementary role. Bank NTT, for example, supports the community by providing access to micro-financing for tourism-related ventures (e.g., boat rentals, homestays), delivers training on basic financial literacy and bookkeeping, and facilitates village-level budgeting sessions. Meanwhile, the Tourism Office offers technical assistance in designing visitor experiences, branding the destination, and coordinating marketing efforts through regional tourism networks. They also ensure that community-based tourism activities comply with local tourism regulations and sustainability guidelines.

Collaborative partnerships also provide institutional legitimacy, as local government integrates ICBT into district plans and supports infrastructure such as roads and sanitation. Informants emphasised the value of these ties, with one noting, “The partnership with Bank NTT helps us access funds and technical guidance, making it easier to manage our tourism activities effectively” (Informants 3, 6, 8, 10), and another adding, “The local government’s involvement ensures that policies are aligned with our needs and provides us with a clear direction for long-term planning” (Informants 5, 7, 9, 11). This framework enhances operational viability, builds trust, and fosters shared accountability. By contrast, partnerships at Mama Lodya’s Strawberry Farm remain minimal and fragmented, limiting financial access, technical guidance, and promotional support, and leaving stakeholders without the structures needed to professionalise their operations.

Participants emphasised that “without consistent support from external partners, we struggle to manage our activities and sustain the initiative” (Informants 4, 8, 10, 12). At Mama Lodya’s Strawberry Farm, basic equipment is absent for processing value-added products, limited training in packaging, guest management, and online marketing, and restricted income and market reach. One informant noted, “We want to attract visitors and expand our product range, but we do not have the tools or knowledge to do it.” The lack of formal partnerships with government, NGOs, or tourism agencies further led to inefficient planning, irregular activity, and dependence on a few individuals. These findings confirm that multi-stakeholder collaboration is symbolic and essential for mobilising resources, strengthening capacity, and ensuring shared responsibility in CBT initiatives.

The second factor concerns balancing power and inclusivity within collaborative frameworks. At Nefo Kaenka Lake, governance combines traditional and procedural systems: Naketi, a

monthly consensus forum in the Lopo, involves elders, women, youth, and tourism managers in decisions on fees, fund use, and visitor rules, while a rotating leadership model assigns roles such as coordinator or treasurer for six-month terms. Meetings are held monthly, with financial and activity reports publicly shared and posted on the village board. These mechanisms ensure transparency, shared authority, and community ownership, with informants stressing that “We are always included in discussions with external partners, which makes us feel valued and ensures decisions reflect our needs” (Informants 2, 6, 9, 11).

In contrast, Paradise Park Post was dominated by external actors, notably a private investor group and a district bureaucrat, who bypassed village institutions and customary leaders in decision-making. Community members reported exclusion from planning, finances, and operations, as one noted, “The investor team decided where the tourist huts would be built and even negotiated land use without asking the traditional landowners” (Informant 5). At the same time, another recalled, “When the entrance fees were set, we were not asked. We only found out after the signs went up” (Informant 10). Such asymmetries fostered resentment and disengagement, showing that external dominance without local participation erodes trust and undermines long-term sustainability. It highlights the importance of power symmetry, inclusivity, and procedural fairness as core elements of effective CBT governance.

The third factor is the implementation of adaptive governance frameworks that promote shared learning, accountability, and flexibility in collaborative partnerships. Our study found that at Nefo Kaenka Lake, adaptive governance mechanisms facilitate continuous dialogue and problem-solving among stakeholders, ensuring that partnerships remain responsive to emerging challenges. Participants noted that “We regularly meet with our partners to discuss issues and adjust strategies, which helps us stay on track and resolve problems quickly” (Informants 3, 6, 9, and 12).

Conversely, at Marble Hill, the absence of adaptive governance limits the initiative’s ability to address conflicts and adapt to challenges. Informants observed that rigid structures and poor communication hinder collaboration. Informants explained that “There is no regular communication or problem-solving process, which makes it difficult to adapt to changes or challenges” (Informants 4, 8, 11, and 13). The novelty here lies in identifying adaptive governance as a dynamic enabler of effective partnerships, highlighting its role in maintaining flexibility and resilience in CBT initiatives. It extends existing theoretical models by integrating responsiveness and shared accountability as critical elements of sustainable governance.

The survivability of ICBT initiatives depends on inclusive leadership, adaptive collaboration, tourism scale, product type, and accessibility. Nefo Kaenka Lake demonstrates how strong governance, diverse offerings, and reliable infrastructure foster resilience, while weaker leadership and limited services at Mama Lodya’s Strawberry Farm and Marble Hill undermine sustainability. As shown in Table 6, differences in multi-stakeholder collaboration, power balance, and adaptive governance shape varying outcomes of survivability. This study advances CBT literature by showing that collaborative partnerships integrating multi-stakeholder coordination, balanced power, and adaptive governance are essential, and that Indigenous practices such as *Naketi* (deliberation), rotating leadership, and community meetings institutionalise transparency and accountability. The key contribution is demonstrating that Indigenous governance traditions serve as cultural identity markers and as functional tools for planning, accountability, and coordination, enabling governance systems that balance local autonomy with external engagement and strengthen long-term resilience.

Table 6. *Data Construct of Collaborative Partnerships*

No.	Construct	Full-Scale Survivability	Limited Survivability	Non-Survivability	Theme
1	Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration	Robust partnerships with Bank NTT and local tourism authorities provide financial and managerial support.	Partnerships are minimal and fragmented, limiting access to resources and technical expertise.	Lack of partnerships and coordination undermines resource allocation and operational sustainability.	Multi-stakeholder collaboration fosters shared responsibility, resource optimisation, and governance stability.
2	Power Balance and Inclusivity	Governance systems prioritise local voices in decision-making, fostering trust and ownership.	Governance excludes broader community participation, weakening inclusivity and trust.	External actors dominate decision-making, marginalising local stakeholders and eroding trust.	Balanced power dynamics and inclusivity enhance trust, participation, and equitable governance.
3	Adaptive Governance	Adaptive governance facilitates continuous dialogue, shared learning, and accountability among stakeholders.	Rigid governance structures hinder flexibility and responsiveness to challenges.	Absence of adaptive governance results in conflicts and poor collaboration.	Adaptive governance ensures flexibility, shared accountability, and responsiveness to socio-economic challenges.

Source: Primary Data, 2024

## 5. Discussion

### Survivability Conditions of ICBT

ICBT initiatives in Fatumnasi fall into three levels of sustainability: non-sustainable, partially sustainable, and fully sustainable. Non-sustainable projects, such as Paradise Park Post, collapsed due to weak resources and community disengagement, highlighting the importance of stability, ownership, and ongoing support (e.g., Savaya & Spiro, 2012; Zielinski et al., 2021). Partially sustainable sites, including Mama Lodya's Strawberry Farm, Mutis Lodge, Brothers Forestry Post, and Marble Hill, show sporadic management and modest economic returns, constrained by limited resources and weak collaboration (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022; Tasci et al., 2014). In contrast, Nefo Kaenka Lake exemplifies full sustainability through stable operations, tangible benefits, and strong participation rooted in cultural practices and inclusive governance. These outcomes underscore the central role of cultural integration, governance quality, and stakeholder collaboration in ICBT survivability, with Nefo Kaenka Lake offering a replicable model for similar contexts.

### Critical Factors for ICBT Survivability

Managing ICBT initiatives in Fatumnasi shows that survivability, the ability to endure and adapt, is shaped by cultural integration, inclusive governance, and external collaboration. Consistent with Arnstein's (2019) Ladder of Participation, empowerment is central: Nefo Kaenka Lake demonstrates how moving from tokenism to genuine participation builds ownership and resilience, supported by training and role differentiation that elevate involvement to delegated power or citizen control. In contrast, Marble Hill reflects limited engagement, and Paradise Park Post shows non-participation, illustrating how weak governance undermines sustainability. These findings affirm that participatory mechanisms are critical for tourism resilience and sustainability (Giampiccoli et al., 2021; Holladay & Powell, 2013).

Cultural governance, rooted in practices such as *Naketi* (customary deliberation), *Meup Tabua* (communal work), and spiritual beliefs like *Uis Neno* and *Uis Pah*, fosters collective responsibility, trust, and cohesion. Nefo Kaenka Lake's cultural frameworks provide a foundation for transparent decision-making and resource management, ensuring operational resilience. In contrast, the inconsistent or absent application of these practices at Marble Hill and Paradise Park Post has led to fragmented governance and weakened stakeholder trust. These

observations resonate with prior studies on the role of cultural integration in enhancing community-based tourism resilience (Lenao, 2015; Songpornwanich et al., 2020).

Economic benefits are another critical dimension influencing ICBT survivability. At Nefo Kaenka Lake, reinvesting tourism revenue into community-driven priorities, such as infrastructure improvements and educational initiatives, creates a virtuous cycle of trust and engagement. Informants highlighted that the visible and equitable distribution of benefits strengthens collective ownership and motivates continued participation. However, at Mama Lodya's Strawberry Farm, limited economic contributions have diminished community commitment, echoing global critiques of unequal benefit distribution in community-based tourism (Gohori & Merwe, 2022). Integrating collaborative practices, such as those symbolised by Feto Mone (gender-cooperative roles) and Lopo (communal gathering), further reinforces operational efficiency and social cohesion, distinguishing successful initiatives from unsustainable ones.

Cultural governance, economic empowerment, and inclusive collaboration provide a holistic framework for CBT resilience. At Nefo Kaenka Lake, adaptive governance fosters responsiveness and shared learning, in contrast to the rigid structures at Marble Hill and Paradise Park Post, which lack flexibility and accountability. As illustrated in Figure 3, these interrelated dimensions form an integrated theoretical model of ICBT survivability, linking participation, cultural governance, economic benefits, and collaborative partnerships. This model shows how empowerment, governance, and traditions jointly drive resilience and equity, positioning Fatumnasi as a benchmark for sustainable ICBT management. Combining Arnstein's participatory theory (2019) with empirical insights, the study offers replicable strategies to address power asymmetries, resource allocation, and community engagement, shifting tourism governance from transactional approaches to frameworks rooted in equity, resilience, and cultural preservation.

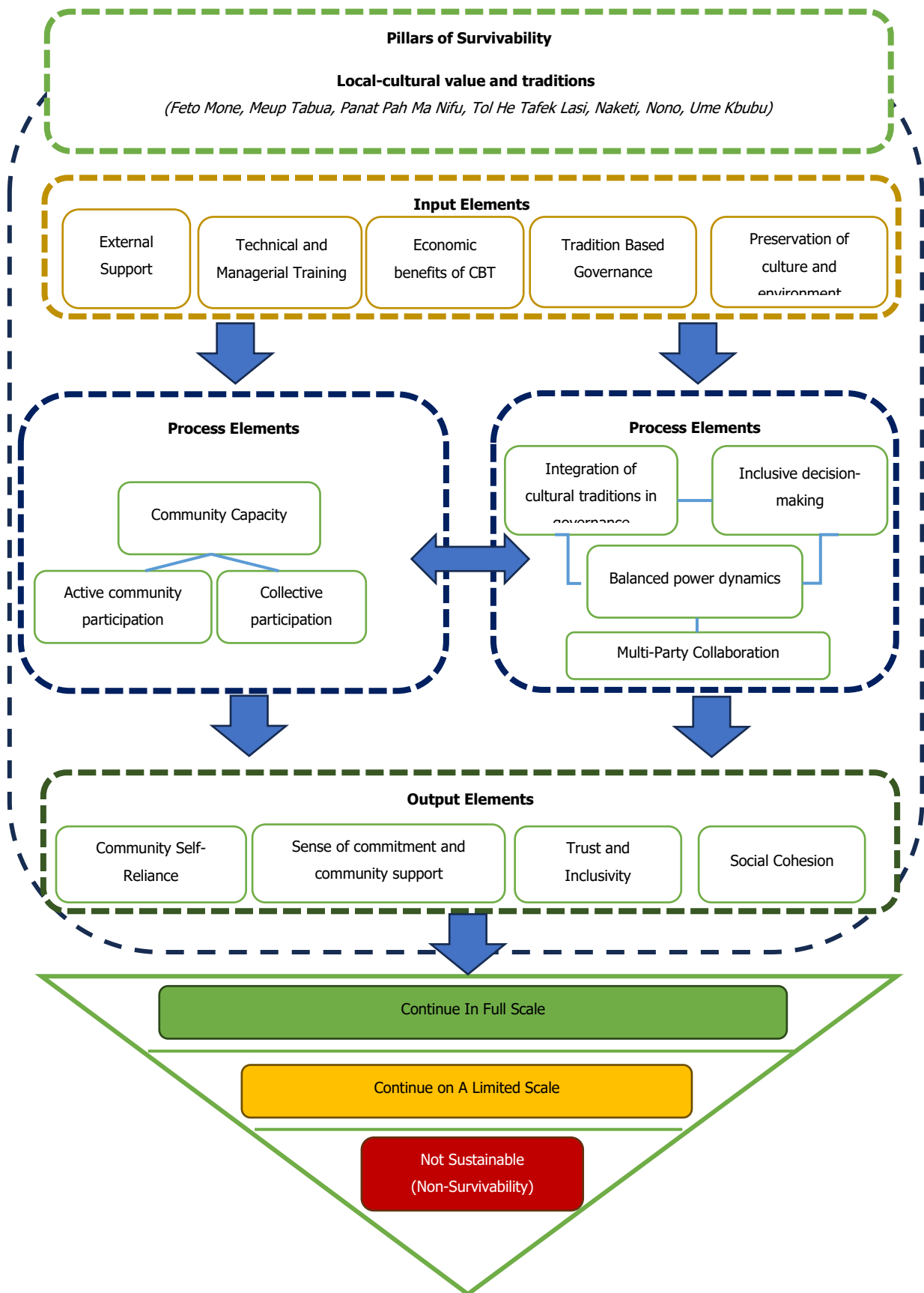


Figure 3. Theoretical Model of CBT survivability in indigenous communities

Source: Author’s construct, 2025

## 6. Conclusion

This study addresses gaps in the global literature on CBT survivability, particularly in culturally rich but economically vulnerable contexts. While prior research stresses the need to identify local factors to avoid project failure (Spenceley, 2012), it often overlooks the role of cultural governance in managing conflicts and inequalities. This study bridges that gap by examining how governance practices, Indigenous values, and multi-stakeholder collaboration shape long-term ICBT outcomes.

The novel findings from this study identify four critical factors that shape the survivability of ICBT initiatives in Fatumnasi. These factors are (1) localised capacity-building, which equips communities with technical and managerial skills to manage tourism resources independently, fostering operational resilience and community ownership; (2) inclusive decision-making processes, where governance rooted in traditions such as *Naketi* ensures collective participation and alignment with community priorities, enhancing trust and unity; (3) transparent benefit accountability, which ensures that tourism revenues are reinvested equitably in community-driven priorities, strengthening engagement and long-term commitment; and (4) consistent external support, which facilitates infrastructure development and resource optimisation, distinguishing sustainable initiatives from those facing stagnation. These findings offer a replicable framework for enhancing ICBT sustainability.

This study's novelty lies in its theoretical contribution to CBT literature. It demonstrates how Indigenous governance, expressed through traditions such as *Ume Kbubu* (solidarity) and *Panat Pah ma Nifu* (environmental stewardship), fosters trust, social cohesion, and conservation. It challenges transactional tourism models and enriches debates on sustainable tourism governance by advancing a framework prioritising equity, resilience, and cultural integration.

For policymakers and practitioners, the findings stress the need for tourism programs that build community capacity, integrate Indigenous governance into decision-making, and ensure transparent benefit-sharing. Targeted support such as training, small-scale infrastructure, and market access can strengthen ownership, while responsive partnerships with banks, NGOs, and government enhance trust. Such approaches move policy frameworks beyond top-down models toward inclusive, culturally grounded, and resilient tourism systems that empower communities and secure long-term viability.

Limitations include the single-region focus, which may limit generalisability, and a cross-sectional design that does not capture long-term dynamics or external pressures such as climate

change. Future research should explore diverse cultural settings, adopt longitudinal methods, and integrate external variables to refine the understanding of CBT governance. Despite these constraints, the findings offer valuable theoretical and practical insights while underscoring the importance of situating CBT within Indigenous cultural systems.

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