Research Article

Multi-level Governance Administrative Support and Integration of Sustainable Development in Community-based Tourism in Basilan

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how multi-level governance (MLG) administrative support systems influenced the integration of sustainable development in community-based tourism (CBT) in Basilan Province, Philippines. Grounded in the multi-level governance framework, the research analyzed coordination across barangay, municipal, provincial, regional, and national institutions in four CBT destinations: Marang-Marang Floating Cottage, Kud Pasangen School of Living Tradition, Lampinigan Island, and the Bajau Cultural Heritage Center of Tampalan. Using a descriptive qualitative design with methodological triangulation, data were collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and structured surveys involving government officials, community leaders, tourism operators, and regional agency representatives. Comparative findings revealed differentiated governance capacities across sites. Marang-Marang and Kud Pasangen demonstrated stronger vertical integration, reflected in documented monitoring systems, broader provincial technical coverage, sustained NGO funding support, and expanding association membership. In contrast, Lampinigan and Tampalan operated primarily through localized coordination mechanisms, with limited provincial engagement, less formalized reporting structures, and reduced access to external capacity-building resources. Structural asymmetries were evident in variations in administrative oversight, monitoring sophistication, funding access, and institutional continuity. Sites with stronger intergovernmental linkages exhibited more institutionalized environmental stewardship, cultural preservation programming, and financial accountability practices. The findings suggested that the effectiveness of sustainable CBT in decentralized contexts depended on the depth and consistency of administrative engagement across governance tiers. By providing comparative empirical evidence from Basilan, the study refined the operational application of multi-level governance theory in tourism and offered policy-relevant insights for strengthening CBT governance in similarly resource-variable and institutionally complex settings.

Keywords: Multi-level Governance; Administrative Support; Sustainable Development; Community-based; Tourism; Basilan

1. Introduction

Governance arrangements have become increasingly important in addressing development initiatives that operate across multiple institutions and territorial levels. Multi-level governance (MLG) offers a

framework for understanding how authority, responsibility, and administrative functions are distributed among national, regional, provincial, and local actors. Kull and Tatar [1] explains that MLG emerged as a response to governance challenges that cannot be effectively managed through centralized systems alone. According to Mosley and Wong [2], development outcomes improve when decision-making authority is shared across interconnected governance layers. Wibisono et al. [3] further clarifies that MLG enhances administrative coordination by enabling institutions to align policies and programs across sectors. Such alignment is necessary for managing complex development initiatives involving multiple stakeholders. These perspectives position MLG as an appropriate lens for examining sectors that rely heavily on coordination and institutional support. Tourism, particularly community-based tourism, reflects these characteristics. This study applies the MLG framework to examine administrative support systems in Basilan.

Community-based tourism (CBT) is widely recognized as a participatory development strategy that places communities at the center of tourism planning and benefit distribution. Bloch et al. [4] argues that tourism initiatives become more responsive and sustainable when communities actively participate in decision-making processes. Local involvement enhances accountability and ensures that tourism reflects community values and priorities. Giampiccoli and Mtapuri [5] further develops this argument by conceptualizing CBT as a governance process rather than merely an economic activity. A meaningful participation requires institutional mechanisms that allow communities to exercise influence beyond consultation. CBT contributes to sustainable development by linking livelihood generation with cultural and environmental stewardship. Sustainability in CBT depends on supportive governance arrangements that protect local resources. These studies collectively suggest that CBT outcomes are shaped by governance quality. Understanding how administrative support enables CBT is therefore essential.

Administrative support functions as the operational backbone of multi-level governance in community-based tourism. Broadhurst and Gray [6] argue that MLG systems rely on clearly defined administrative roles to prevent overlap and institutional conflict. Coordination mechanisms such as planning alignment, monitoring systems, and communication channels are critical for effective governance. Local tourism initiatives often depend on administrative guidance and technical assistance from higher governance levels. Without such support, communities may struggle to sustain tourism operations. Administrative facilitation allows communities to move toward higher levels of participation and control. Hawkins et al. [7] further highlights that administrative capacity influences how sustainability principles are translated into practice. These insights underscore that governance structures alone are insufficient without functional administrative mechanisms. In Basilan, examining these mechanisms provides insight into how CBT initiatives are supported across governance levels. The integration of sustainable development into tourism governance has become a central concern in both policy and academic discourse. Krittayaruangroj et al. [8] defines sustainability in CBT as the balanced pursuit of economic viability, environmental protection, and social equity. Sustainability must be embedded within governance processes rather than treated as an add-on objective. Van Zanten and Putintseva [9] argue that multi-level governance enhances sustainability by aligning local actions with broader development goals. Vertical coordination prevents policy fragmentation that can undermine long-term outcomes. Sustainability is reinforced when communities perceive long-term benefits from tourism. These benefits encourage stewardship and responsible resource use. In CBT settings, sustainability is closely linked to governance effectiveness. Basilan's tourism context requires governance systems that integrate sustainability across administrative levels.

Decentralization provides the institutional foundation for multi-level governance in the Philippine tourism sector. Howssein et al. [10] notes that decentralized governance allows local governments to respond more effectively to community needs. Decentralization creates opportunities for communities to engage

directly in tourism management. However, decentralization must be accompanied by administrative support to be effective. A decentralization without coordination can lead to uneven development outcomes. Administrative support systems play a crucial role in ensuring that policy mandates are effectively implemented at the organizational level, as Chavez et al. [11] supported that compliance and awareness are shaped by the presence of clear institutional guidance and monitoring mechanisms Lisa-Maria and Jens [12] further argues that sustainability goals are weakened when governance responsibilities are unclear. These highlight the importance of structured administrative support within decentralized systems. In Basilan, governance operates across barangay, municipal, provincial, and regional levels. Understanding how these levels interact is crucial for evaluating CBT governance. Basilan presents a distinct context for examining multi-level governance in community-based tourism due to its geographic, cultural, and socio-political characteristics. Tourism in culturally diverse areas requires governance systems sensitive to local identities. Trust between communities and institutions is essential for participatory tourism development [13]. Community empowerment depends on sustained institutional engagement. These perspectives suggest that governance effectiveness is shaped by context-specific conditions. In Basilan, historical challenges coexist with emerging tourism opportunities. Administrative support plays a critical role in bridging these dynamics. Studying Basilan allows for deeper understanding of how MLG operates in complex local environments.

Despite extensive literature on multi-level governance and community-based tourism, limited empirical research examines how administrative support systems function within decentralized governance contexts in the Philippines, particularly in regions operating under autonomous administrative arrangements such as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Existing studies frequently discuss CBT governance conceptually but rarely interrogate how barangay, municipal, provincial, regional, and national actors operationalize sustainability mandates in practice under conditions of fiscal and administrative asymmetry. Governance models often appear coherent in theory but exhibit uneven implementation across localities, especially in geographically peripheral provinces where institutional capacity and intergovernmental coordination vary significantly.

In Basilan Province, community-based tourism represents an emerging but strategic development pathway linked to cultural preservation, coastal resource management, and livelihood diversification. CBT initiatives in the province operate across small island communities, heritage schools, and coastal associations, with varying levels of organized membership, LGU engagement, and access to provincial or regional support. While tourism contributes to local livelihood supplementation and community-based enterprise formation, participation intensity, institutional coverage, and sustainability programming differ across sites. These contextual conditions underscore the urgency of examining how decentralized governance arrangements concretely shape sustainability integration in Basilan's CBT sector.

Fisher et al. [14] argues that sustainability outcomes depend on how policies are implemented rather than how they are designed. Basilan's CBT initiatives offer an opportunity to examine these dynamics empirically. This study investigates how multi-level governance administrative support facilitates the integration of sustainable development in community-based tourism. It contributes to governance and tourism scholarship and informs policy development in similar contexts. Guided by a multi-level governance perspective, this study examines how administrative support systems across governance levels facilitate the integration of sustainable development in community-based tourism

1.1. Objectives

This study seeks to analyze how multi-level governance administrative support systems contribute to the integration of sustainable development within community-based tourism initiatives in selected areas of Basilan Province. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine the administrative support mechanisms that enable coordination across governance levels, including planning processes, communication channels, monitoring practices, regulatory arrangements, and stakeholder networks.

2. Analyze the distribution of roles and functional relationships among community organizations and government units (barangay, LGU, province, region, national agencies) in supporting and sustaining CBT initiatives.

3. Evaluate how sustainability principles are embedded within governance and administrative practices, especially environmental protection, resource management, and policy alignment.

2. Literature

2.1. Community-Based tourism governance

Community-based tourism is widely viewed as a governance approach that prioritizes local participation and shared decision-making. Rahman et al. [15] argues that tourism development is more sustainable when communities play an active role in governance processes; local involvement enhances legitimacy and accountability. Aquino [16] conceptualizes community-based tourism as a ladder of participation, where higher levels reflect greater community control. His work shows that governance structures determine the extent of empowerment. Shrestha et al. [17] emphasizes that community-based tourism strengthens cultural preservation when governance systems protect local values. She argues that tourism governance must respect indigenous knowledge systems. A participation fosters social cohesion and collective responsibility. Governance systems shape community engagement. Dangi and Petrick [18] further highlight that governance arrangements influence how communities negotiate tourism benefits. These perspectives underline governance as central to community-based tourism outcomes.

Governance challenges in community-based tourism often arise from institutional mismatches. Jackson [19] explain that community-based tourism initiatives struggle when governance systems impose top-down control. It shows the of balancing authority between institutions and communities. External support can both empower and constrain communities, depending on governance design. They emphasize that unclear governance roles lead to dependency. Governance inequalities emerge when communities lack access to administrative resources. This stress the need for inclusive governance frameworks. Governance failures often stem from insufficient institutional trust [20]. Trust-building is a governance responsibility. Therefore, effective governance enhances community confidence. These studies collectively demonstrate that governance quality shapes community-based tourism sustainability.

2.2. Sustainability integration in tourism

Sustainability has become a central concern in tourism governance due to increasing environmental and social pressures. Hashemkhani Zolfani et al. [21] defines sustainable tourism as a balance between economic benefits, environmental protection, and social equity. It emphasizes that sustainability must be embedded in governance systems rather than treated as a separate objective. Governance structures are essential for managing sustainability trade-offs. It highlights the need for institutional accountability mechanisms. Hes [22] adds that community engagement strengthens sustainability outcomes by fostering stewardship values.

Governance systems must support long-term perspectives. Sutresna and Suyana [23] further argues that sustainability in community-based tourism depends on participatory governance. It suggest that communities protect resources when they are involved in decision-making. Multi-level governance facilitates sustainability by aligning policies across levels. These perspectives emphasize sustainability as a governance outcome. The integration of sustainability into tourism governance requires coordinated administrative action. Environmental goals often fail when governance systems lack enforcement mechanisms. Sustainability depends on institutional capacity. Daniel Wiegant et al. [24] highlights that sustainability initiatives succeed when aligned with local development priorities. Governance coherence enhances effectiveness. Das et al. [25] argues that sustainability is reinforced when tourism benefits are equitably distributed. Moreover, governance systems influence benefit-sharing mechanisms. Policy fragmentation undermines sustainability integration. It supports the importance of cross-level coordination. Showing that sustainability outcomes improve when governance roles are clearly defined. These studies collectively underscore the role of governance in sustainability integration.

2.3. Capacity building and institutional support

Capacity building is a crucial element of governance systems that support community-based tourism. Cahyaningrum et al. [26] argues that communities require skills and organizational capacity to participate effectively in tourism governance. Capacity building enables higher levels of participation. Training enhances professionalism in tourism operations. A governance institutions serves a key role in providing such support. Clark et al. [27] explains that capacity building strengthens community resilience and adaptive capacity. She emphasizes that skills development supports sustainability goals. Sapkota et al. [28] argue that institutional support reduces community vulnerability in tourism systems external assistance shapes governance outcomes. Governance effectiveness depends on institutional capacity across levels. These perspectives highlight capacity building as a governance function. Institutional support systems also influence the long-term sustainability of community-based tourism. Unequal access to institutional resources limits community participation, the importance of inclusive support mechanisms. Partnerships enhance institutional learning and capacity development. Collaboration improves governance performance. Capacity building supports environmental governance. Institutions must invest in local capabilities. Tavousi and Makian [29] reinforces that institutional support strengthens community confidence. These studies collectively demonstrate that capacity building and institutional support are central to effective tourism governance.

2.4. Intergovernmental collaboration

Intergovernmental collaboration is a central feature of governance systems that manage tourism across multiple administrative levels. Intergovernmental collaboration as a process through which public organizations jointly address shared policy challenges. Collaboration enhances collective capacity when authority is distributed [30]. Multi-level governance systems depend on sustained intergovernmental interaction to prevent policy fragmentation [31]. So, collaboration is especially important in territorially diverse regions. A coollaborative governance reduces institutional silos by encouraging policy coherence. It is because ollaboration improves responsiveness to local needs. Tschannen-Moran [32] further highlight that collaboration requires shared motivation and institutional trust. Trust-building is essential for sustaining joint action. Furthermore, collaborative governance succeeds when power imbalances are actively managed. These perspectives position intergovernmental collaboration as a governance necessity rather than an option. The effectiveness of intergovernmental collaboration in tourism depends on institutional design and administrative capacity. Collaboration must be supported by formal structures to avoid dependency on informal relationships [33]. Administrative clarity strengthens coordination outcomes. Unclear mandates weaken collaborative performance. Collaborative outcomes improve when performance is jointly monitored.

Their findings emphasize learning-oriented governance. Collaboration is a dynamic process requiring continuous engagement. These insights demonstrate that intergovernmental collaboration is foundational to effective tourism governance.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative research design to examine how multi-level governance structures and administrative support systems facilitate the integration of sustainable development within community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives in selected areas of Basilan Province. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand governance arrangements, institutional interactions, and administrative processes as they occur in real community settings rather than to measure predefined variables or test causal relationships. Qualitative descriptive designs are particularly suitable for exploring complex governance systems, as they allow for detailed examination of roles, coordination patterns, and decision-making processes across multiple levels of authority. Given the study's focus on governance configurations, stakeholder participation, and sustainability integration, this design enabled an in-depth, context-sensitive analysis of how policies and administrative mechanisms are translated into practice at the community level.

3.2. Participants and sampling

Participants in the study consisted of individuals directly involved in the planning, management, regulation, and implementation of CBT activities. Participants included tourism officers, community leaders, tourism operators, barangay officials, representatives from regional agencies such as the Ministry of Trade, Investments and Tourism (MTIT-BARMM), and members of community-based tourism (CBT) associations. A total of thirty tow (32) participants were engaged in the study, consisting of key informant interviewees, focus group discussion participants across FGDs, and structured survey respondents Participants were proportionally distributed across governance levels, ensuring representation from barangay officials, municipal/city tourism offices, provincial tourism authorities, regional ministry representatives, and national or NGO partners. The four CBT sites were comparatively represented to allow cross-site analysis of governance variation.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants possessed direct knowledge of governance processes, administrative coordination, and community participation in tourism initiatives. This approach enhanced analytical representativeness by including actors from different governance tiers and functional roles, strengthening the credibility and transferability of findings. Purposive sampling is the better matching of the sample to the aims and objectives of the research, thus improving the rigour of the study and trustworthiness of the dana and results [34]. This sampling strategy is appropriate in qualitative governance research where the objective is to obtain in-depth insights from key actors rather than achieve statistical representation. The selection of participants was guided by their functional roles within governance structures, ensuring that perspectives from different levels and sectors were adequately represented.

The study was conducted in four community-based tourism destinations in Basilan Province. Firstly, Marang-Marang Floating Cottage is a coastal community-managed floating tourism facility operating within a mangrove and marine ecosystem setting. The site functions primarily as a seafood-based floating cottage attraction where visitors rent cottages and consume locally harvested seafood prepared by association members. Tourism operations are managed by a formally organized community association whose membership has expanded over time, reflecting increasing community engagement. The site accommodates

day visitors and small group bookings, with visitor logs maintained at the barangay level for monitoring and safety purposes. Additionally, Kud Pasangen School of Living Tradition operates as a cultural and heritage-based tourism site centered on traditional weaving (Tennun) and indigenous knowledge transmission. The attraction integrates tourism activities with cultural education, youth involvement, and preservation programming. As a School of Living Tradition, it receives periodic technical and cultural support from provincial, regional, and national agencies. Visitor activity is typically linked to cultural demonstrations, educational tours, and institutional visits rather than high-volume leisure tourism.

Moreover, Lampinigan Island (Lampinigan Beach) is a coastal and beach-based community tourism site managed in coordination with barangay officials and municipal authorities. The attraction primarily caters to leisure visitors seeking island and beach recreation. Environmental management practices such as waste monitoring and caretaker supervision are implemented locally. Tourism operations are seasonal and dependent on local visitation patterns, with governance coordination largely facilitated at the barangay and municipal levels. In additional, the Bajau Cultural Heritage Center of Tampalan is a community-driven cultural preservation site representing the Bajau community. Tourism activities revolve around cultural exhibitions, traditional knowledge sharing, and the operation of a School of Living Tradition supported through external cultural initiatives. The site operates at a smaller scale compared to the more established destinations, with governance support largely mediated through barangay coordination and project-based partnerships.

3.3. Data gathering

To ensure methodological rigor and triangulation, the study utilized key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and structured surveys. The combination of these methods allowed for the integration of institutional perspectives and community experiences, strengthening the credibility of the findings. Triangulation is widely recognized as an effective strategy for enhancing validity in qualitative research, particularly in studies involving complex governance systems Moreover, Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or dana sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena [35]. KIIs provided in-depth insights into administrative structures and policy implementation, FGDs captured collective community perspectives and participatory dynamics, and surveys generated descriptive data on governance practices and institutional support mechanisms. This multi-method approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of how governance operates across levels and how sustainability principles are embedded in CBT management.

Key informant interviews were conducted with local government officials, tourism officers, community leaders, and representatives from regional and national agencies. These interviews focused on governance structures, administrative procedures, coordination mechanisms, policy implementation, and institutional roles in supporting CBT initiatives. KIIs are particularly valuable in governance research because they provide access to insider knowledge, policy interpretations, and operational realities that are not easily observable. Moreover, Focus group discussions were conducted with members of community tourism associations and local residents actively engaged in CBT activities. These discussions explored community participation, decision-making arrangements, internal organization, collaborative practices, and the integration of cultural knowledge into tourism management. FGDs are effective in capturing shared meanings, group dynamics, and collective experiences, making them suitable for studies examining participation and community governance. Additionally, Structured surveys were administered to complement qualitative data by capturing respondents' perceptions of governance effectiveness, coordination quality, transparency, role clarity, and administrative support. The surveys also generated descriptive information on participation frequency, interaction with government institutions, and access to capacity-

building programs. In qualitative-dominant studies, surveys can serve as supportive tools to validate and contextualize narrative findings [36]. The survey data were not used for inferential statistical analysis but to provide an overview of governance practices and to strengthen the interpretation of qualitative themes across the four CBT sites.

3.4. Data procedure

The preparatory phase involved coordination with local authorities and community leaders to secure permissions and schedule data collection activities. This was followed by the data gathering phase, during which KIIs, FGDs, and surveys were conducted across the four CBT sites, ensuring representation from different governance levels and stakeholder groups. The documentation phase involved audio-recording interviews and discussions, supplemented by field notes to capture contextual observations. In the data organization phase, transcripts were prepared and survey responses were tabulated to facilitate systematic analysis. Finally, the data analysis phase involved integrating qualitative and descriptive data in accordance with the study's analytical framework. A structured research procedure is essential in governance studies to ensure consistency, transparency, and analytical rigor [37].

3.5. Data analysis

The study employed thematic analysis FGD transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve data familiarization, after which initial codes were generated to identify recurring patterns related to governance structures, administrative mechanisms, stakeholder roles, and sustainability practices. Codes were organized into broader thematic categories such as vertical and horizontal coordination, administrative support systems, role distribution and interdependence, community participation, sustainability integration, and capacity building. These themes were analyzed across the four CBT sites to identify similarities, variations, and governance gaps. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize survey responses and to support qualitative interpretations. The analytical focus remained on how governance actors interact across levels, how administrative mechanisms function in practice, and how sustainability principles are embedded within tourism governance processes.

3.6. Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection, and all research procedures complied with established ethical standards for social research involving human participants. All respondents were fully informed of the purpose and scope of the study, and voluntary informed consent was obtained before any interview, focus group discussion, or survey administration. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by removing personal identifiers and using codes in place of names in all transcripts and datasets. Digital recordings, transcripts, and survey files were stored in password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. No financial or material compensation was provided to participants to avoid coercion or undue influence. These ethical safeguards ensured that the rights, privacy, and well-being of all participants were protected throughout the research process.

4. Results and discussion

Objective 1. Examine the administrative support mechanisms that enable coordination across governance levels, including planning processes, communication channels, monitoring practices, regulatory arrangements, and stakeholder networks.
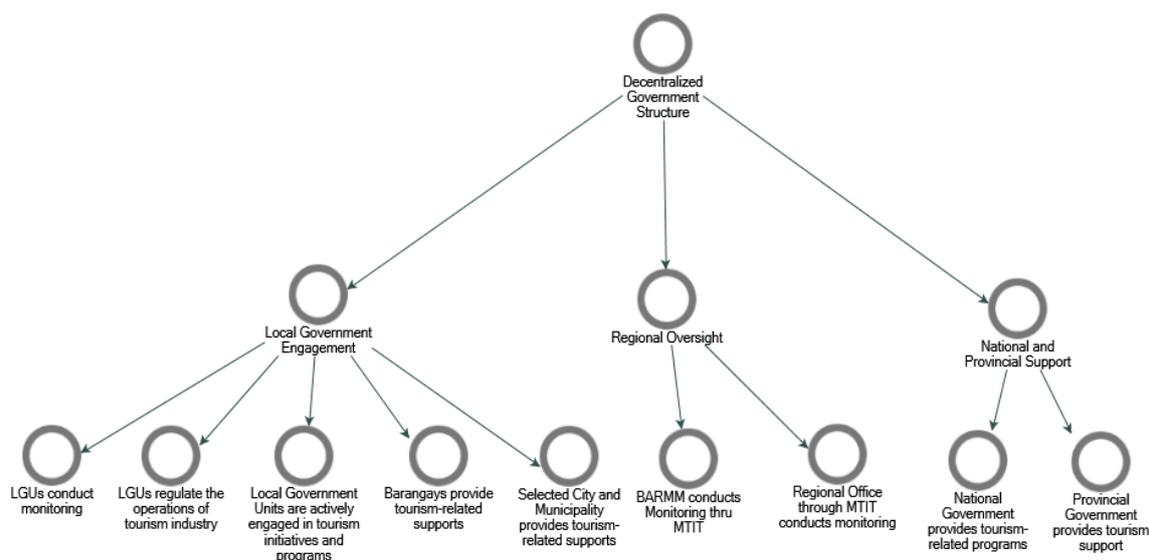
Figure 1. Decentralized Government Structure.

The decentralized governance structure illustrated in Figure 1 showed how community-based tourism (CBT) in Basilan operated through a five-tiered but interconnected system involving barangay, municipal, provincial, regional, and national institutions. Empirical accounts across the four sites confirmed that barangays and municipal LGUs functioned as frontline administrative actors. Participants from Marang-Marang and Lampinigan explained that daily visitor arrivals were recorded through logbooks, safety briefings were routinely conducted, and standardized house rules were enforced before cottage rentals were approved. A barangay official described, "Kami ang unang nagmo-monitor ng visitors at nagche-check ng compliance," emphasizing operational responsibility at the local level. These practices demonstrated active administrative discretion and localized enforcement mechanisms, consistent with Ibrahim [38], who revealed that decentralized systems become effective when frontline units exercise practical authority in routine governance functions. Monitoring processes were institutionalized in stronger-governance sites such as Marang-Marang and Kud Pasangen, whereas in Tampalan documentation was described as more informal and dependent on community volunteers.

Wang and Weng [39] argued that decentralized tourism governance becomes more effective when local authorities regulate pricing systems, visitor conduct, and cultural observance rules. This pattern was evident in Marang-Marang, where LGUs coordinated uniform rental fees and implemented common visitor guidelines, and in Lampinigan, where barangay officials regulated environmental cleanliness and entry controls. Cross-site comparison indicated variation in the sophistication of monitoring mechanisms, with Marang-Marang maintaining structured reporting formats while Tampalan relied more on verbal coordination. These differences highlighted structural asymmetries in administrative capacity across sites. Despite these variations, collaborative fee-setting and shared enforcement between LGUs and community associations reinforced collective accountability.

Community-based tourism governance functioned through vertical layering rather than isolated authority. Participants consistently described municipal and city governments as the most visible coordinating institutions, while barangays handled immediate site-level management. In Kud Pasangen, barangay-led security improvements and communal facility maintenance demonstrated shared administrative responsibility between LGUs and community organizations. Shair-Rosenfield [40] added that decentralization becomes more resilient when higher-level institutions reinforce local decisions rather than override them.

This interaction was reflected in how city offices coordinated with barangay leaders during peak tourist visits and compliance inspections.

Provincial and regional levels strengthened the decentralized system through technical oversight, cultural programming, and dana consolidation. Provincial offices aggregated tourism statistics, facilitated weaving-center support, and coordinated cultural presentations linked to Tennun production. He and Zhang [41] explained that provincial-level engagement in decentralized tourism systems acts as a stabilizing mechanism integrating cultural industries into broader development strategies, a dynamic reflected in Basilan's investment in cultural preservation initiatives. Pearce further argued that decentralization becomes more functional when upper-level governments provide enabling structures without displacing local initiative, consistent with the province's role in enhancing market visibility while allowing associations to manage operations autonomously.

At the regional level, MTIT–BARMM operated as an oversight and standard-setting body. Participants described periodic monitoring visits, logbook reviews, and technical consultations aimed at aligning CBT operations with tourism standards. Esmaeili [42] explained that regional oversight in decentralized systems sustains quality assurance and policy coherence, which aligned with MTIT's monitoring and assessment procedures. However, cross-site comparison indicated uneven regional coverage, with Marang-Marang and Kud Pasangen reporting more frequent engagement than Lampinigan and Tampalan, demonstrating variation in administrative reach.

National agencies complemented this structure by channeling cultural grants, equipment, digital connectivity, and livelihood assistance. NCCA, NCIP, DICT, DOLE, and related agencies provided weaving equipment, training programs, and promotional support for Schools of Living Tradition. Scott noted that top-down support strengthens decentralized governance when resources flow downward without disrupting community autonomy. This pattern was reflected in how national assistance enhanced local capacity while operational control remained at the community level. Figure 1 captured not merely a formal hierarchy but a functionally differentiated governance system in which effectiveness depended on the depth of intergovernmental coordination, monitoring sophistication, and consistency of administrative presence across tiers. Cross-site differences illustrated how variations in vertical linkage intensity shaped sustainability integration outcomes within Basilan's decentralized CBT system.

The structured communication and coordination mechanisms that governed tourism-related decision-making across Basilan's multi-level system. Empirical accounts confirmed the presence of a sequenced approval and implementation protocol linking local governments, the regional ministry, and the Bangsamoro Parliament. Rather than representing a generic coordination model, the figure reflected an actual operational pathway described consistently by participants across sites. Proposals for tourism development originated at the barangay or municipal level, were endorsed through local resolutions, elevated to the Ministry of Trade, Investments and Tourism (MTIT–BARMM) for technical facilitation and evaluation, and subsequently presented to the Bangsamoro Parliament for budgetary approval. Upon approval, funds were downloaded to LGUs for localized implementation. This process was clearly articulated by an MTIT officer: "When it's endorsed by the local government, it will be forwarded to us. We will facilitate it in the region… The MTIT, through the Bureau of Tourism, will present it to the parliament. If they approve it, the allocation will be downloaded to the LGU, and the LGU will implement the projects."
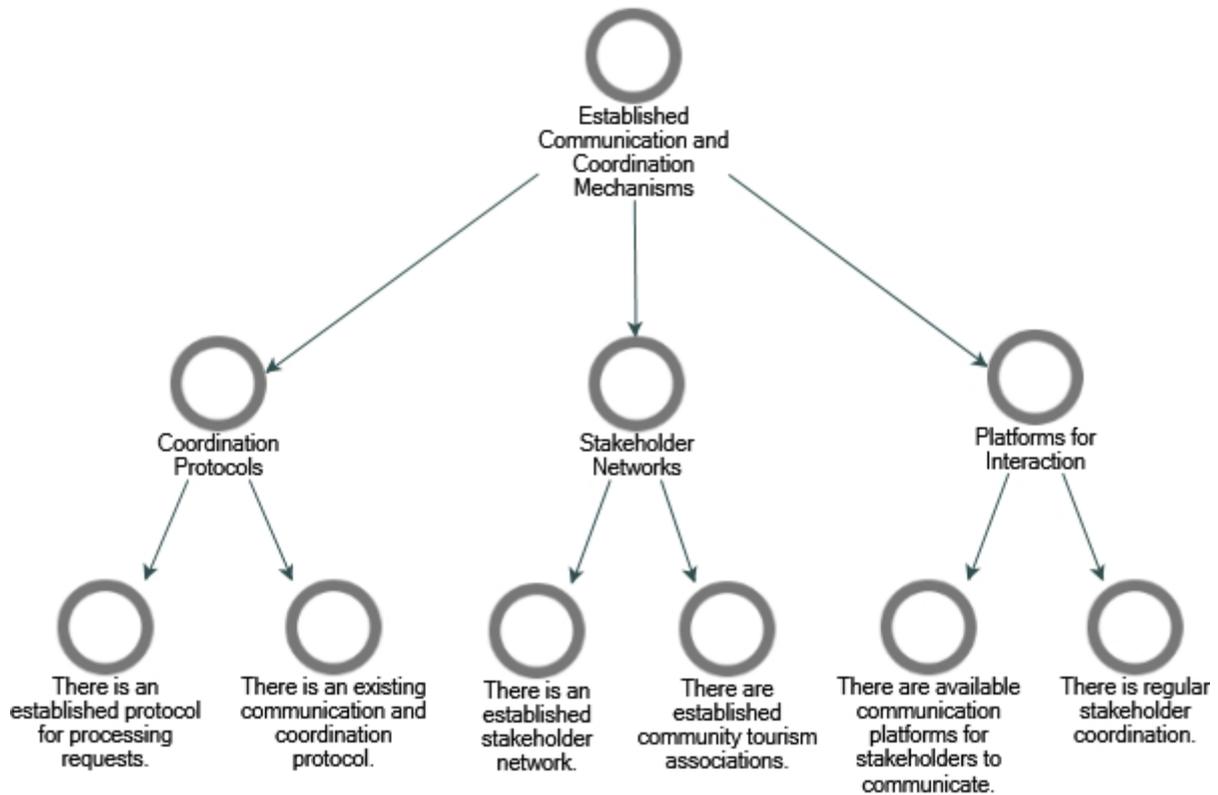
Figure 2. Established Communication and Coordination Mechanisms.

This sequenced intergovernmental flow demonstrated clearly defined vertical coordination, consistent with Nunkoo [43], who highlighted that tourism governance systems become more effective when institutional roles across levels are clearly structured to reduce duplication and accountability gaps. Everton et al. [44] similarly emphasized that formal approval pathways enhance transparency and maintain policy alignment from formulation to execution. In Basilan, stronger-governance sites such as Marang-Marang and Kud Pasangen reported more frequent engagement with this formalized pathway, while Lampinigan and Tampalan described fewer instances of direct parliamentary-linked funding support, indicating variation in administrative reach. Acciai and Terlizzi [45] argued that layered coordination structures maintain institutional coherence in multi-actor environments, a pattern observable in how regional facilitation did not replace local authority but operated as an enabling intermediary.

Coordination protocols also governed stakeholder engagement processes. MTIT officers emphasized procedural adherence, stating: "As part of protocol and coordination, we go through the LGUs. We don't want to go directly to the community without proper coordination." This statement illustrated that regional actors deliberately respected local jurisdiction, preventing legitimacy gaps and reinforcing decentralized governance integrity. Bypassing LGU channels was consistently avoided to maintain institutional accountability and community trust. Beyond formal governmental procedures, findings revealed a dense stakeholder ecosystem supported by political leadership, inter-organizational networks, and structured consultation platforms. Boom et al. [46] noted that stakeholder access in tourism governance is frequently enabled through leadership networks and relational capital, reflected in the observation: "When it comes to stakeholders, it's about network and connections… In fairness to our Mayor, her connections are really vast." Huang et al. [47] emphasized that participation in seminars, workshops, and national-level engagements expands collaborative networks, which was evident in the exposure of Kud Pasangen and Marang-Marang

leaders to regional and national tourism events. Political commitment further reinforced coordination depth, aligning with Askali [48] who linked governance effectiveness to sustained political will and community trust.

At the provincial level, the Tourism Council functioned as a structured coordination venue integrating NGOs, security forces, and educational institutions. As described by a tourism officer: "The tourism council includes NGOs, our men in uniform, and even schools… It's a big help because they are included." This institutionalized venue provided an inclusive platform for planning and cross-sectoral dialogue. Participants described it as "the only avenue where the community has active participation… their input is very important in designing programs," underscoring its role as a bridging mechanism between grassroots actors and higher-level institutions. At the community level, organized associations anchored operational sustainability and participatory governance. The Marang-Marang Women's Association, Kud Pasangen School of Living Tradition, and BAWWAT served as structured organizational units responsible for membership coordination, livelihood management, and internal accountability. The Marang-Marang association demonstrated measurable growth, expanding from 30 to 125 members, as explained by their president: "Our responsibility is to sustain our livelihood… We were only 30 before; now we are 125. They saw our unity and the benefits we get." Regularized coordination was sustained through structured meetings, with members affirming, "The association meeting is effective. Monthly meeting," and leaders noting, "We were able to voice out all the challenges we encounter in the community."

Cross-site comparison indicated differences in the density and regularity of coordination platforms. Marang-Marang and Kud Pasangen demonstrated more institutionalized council participation and broader external linkages, whereas Lampinigan and Tampalan relied more heavily on barangay-led consultations and localized communication channels. These differences illustrated structural asymmetries in coordination depth and network reach, despite the presence of a formally defined multi-level governance framework. Figure 2 represented not a generic schematic but an empirically grounded coordination architecture characterized by sequenced intergovernmental approval flows, structured stakeholder inclusion, and differentiated levels of engagement across sites. The effectiveness of these mechanisms depended on the consistency of vertical linkages and the strength of community-based organizational platforms operating within Basilan's decentralized tourism governance system.

Objective 2. Analyze the distribution of roles and functional relationships among community organizations and government units (barangay, LGU, province, region, national agencies) in supporting and sustaining CBT initiatives.

Table 1 presents a structured cross-site comparison of governance indicators across the four CBT destinations, allowing systematic evaluation of coordination mechanisms, role clarity, institutional support depth, monitoring presence, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability integration. For analytical clarity, governance strength was examined across three comparative dimensions: (1) administrative coordination intensity, (2) vertical support coverage, and (3) sustainability operationalization. Marang-Marang Floating Cottage and Kud Pasangen School of Living Tradition demonstrate higher governance intensity across all three dimensions. These sites exhibit regularized communication platforms, documented monitoring systems, established community associations with expanding membership bases, sustained provincial and national engagement, and active NGO partnerships. Lampinigan Beach and the Bajau Cultural Heritage Center of Tampalan demonstrate moderate coordination structures but comparatively lower vertical support coverage and less institutionalized monitoring sophistication. This comparative framework clarifies governance asymmetries by showing that stronger sites benefit from both dense horizontal community organization and

consistent vertical reinforcement from higher governance levels, whereas emerging sites rely more heavily on localized initiative with limited structured reinforcement.

Palingkod et al. [49] reveals that clear communication platforms are essential for effective governance, which corresponds with these sites' regular consultations, role dissemination, and structured communication systems linking associations and LGUs. Transparent communication enhances decision-making and program coordination, aligning with the well-defined roles and stakeholder engagement found in both sites. Sustainable tourism governance requires active participation of stakeholders at multiple levels, reflected in youth engagement, community association involvement, and collaborative decisions Panagiotopoulou & Skoultsos [50] shown in the table. Dredge also explains that synergy between community organizations and LGUs strengthens administrative coherence, matching the integrated support from barangays, city offices, provincial agencies, and national programs observed in Kud Pasangen. Governance effectiveness increases when regulatory authority is paired with community ownership, which aligns with Marang-Marang's monitored operations, regulated tourism activities, and strong community respect for government authority. Governance networks thrive when multi-level institutions support local initiatives, reflected in both sites' combination of LGU monitoring, NGO support, and national cultural programming.

Table 1. Multi-level Governance Practices.

Community-Based Tourism Destination	Multi-Level Governance Practices
MARANG-MARANG FLOATING COTTAGE	• Accessible communication platforms are available for stakeholder interaction. • Community roles are clearly defined and effectively communicated. • Community members actively participate in tourism-related programs and activities. • Communities take part in tourism-related activities and decision-making processes. • Local Government Units (LGUs) are actively involved in tourism initiatives and programs. • Stakeholders actively engage in tourism programs. • LGUs carry out monitoring activities. • Community interactions are harmonious. • Community consultations are regularly conducted. • Community members demonstrate a strong sense of ownership. • The selected city and municipality provide support for tourism-related initiatives. • LGUs regulate tourism industry operations. • Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide tourism-related support. • The community shows high respect for government authority. • Community tourism associations are formally established.
KUD PASANGEN SCHOOL OF LIVING TRADITION	• Communication platforms are available for stakeholders to interact. • Community roles are clearly defined and effectively communicated. • The national government provides tourism-related programs. • Youth are actively engaged in tourism-related programs. • Barangays provide support for tourism-related initiatives. • Community members actively participate in tourism-related programs and activities. • Communities are involved in tourism-related activities and decision-making processes. • Community tourism associations are established. • Stakeholders are actively engaged in tourism programs. • Community interactions are harmonious. • Community consultations are conducted. • The provincial government provides tourism-related support. • The selected city and municipality offer tourism-related support. • Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide tourism-related support. • The community shows a high level of respect for government authority.

Community-Based Tourism Destination	Multi-Level Governance Practices
LAMPINIGAN BEACH	• Community members exhibit a sense of ownership. • The selected city and municipality provide tourism-related support. • Communication platforms are available for stakeholder communication. • Community members actively participate in tourism-related programs and activities. • Local Government Units (LGUs) are actively involved in tourism initiatives and programs. • Stakeholders take environmental considerations into account when making decisions. • Community tourism associations are established. • Stakeholders are engaged in tourism programs. • LGUs carry out monitoring activities.
BAJAU CULTURAL HERITAGE OF TAMPALAN	• Community interactions are harmonious. • Community consultations are conducted. • The selected city and municipality provide tourism-related support. • Communication platforms are available for stakeholder interaction. • Communities are involved in tourism-related activities and decision-making processes. • Stakeholders are actively engaged in tourism programs. • Na established stakeholder network is in place. • Community tourism associations are established.

Table 1. (*Continued*)

In contrast, Table 1 indicates that Lampinigan Beach and the Bajau Cultural Heritage Center of Tampalan demonstrate foundational but less comprehensive multi-level governance structures. These sites maintain communication platforms, stakeholder engagement, and community associations but show fewer indicators of sustained provincial or national support. Emerging tourism destinations often have basic governance practices but lack the institutional depth seen in more established sites, matching the limited involvement of NGOs and higher-level government units Shin et al., [51] in Lampinigan and Tampalan. The gaps in governance capacity arise when monitoring, regulation, and coordination rely heavily on local initiative rather than multi-level integration. Community cohesion and stakeholder networks can compensate for limited government support, evident in Tampalan's harmonious interactions and established stakeholder networks despite fewer regulatory structures. Developing sites can gradually strengthen governance by institutionalizing communication routines and expanding partnerships [52]. Governance asymmetry is common in decentralized systems where stronger sites receive more institutional support due to visibility and capacity, consistent with the high support concentration in Marang-Marang and Kud Pasangen. Weaker sites require targeted interventions to enhance multi-level coordination, suggesting that Lampinigan and Tampalan must strengthen monitoring, LGU involvement, and external linkages to achieve governance parity with the more supported sites.
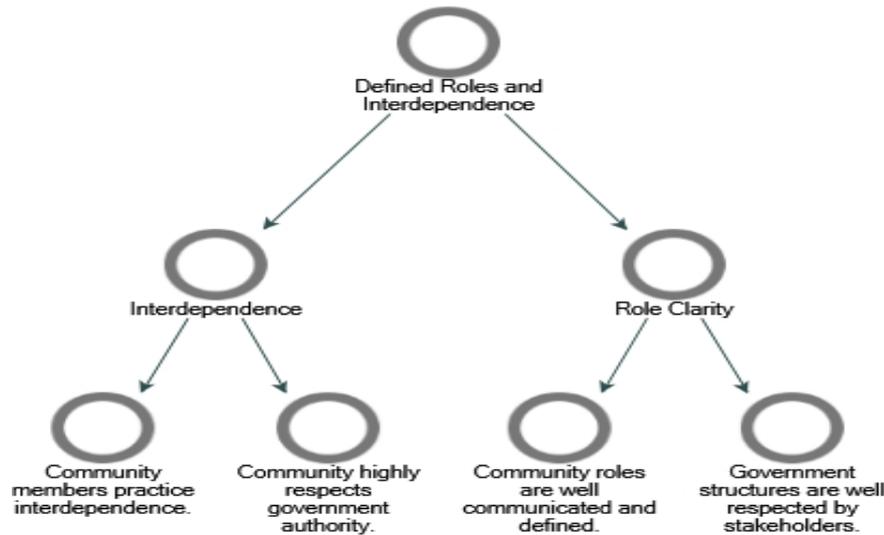
Figure 3. Defined Roles and Interdependence.

Figure 3 illustrated how clearly defined roles and strong interdependence structured community-based tourism (CBT) governance across the four study sites. Participants consistently framed tourism as a collective responsibility rather than an individual livelihood activity. Community members emphasized that initiatives are only possible "with the support of the people behind you," while operating alone was described as "difficult" and unsustainable. This collective orientation reflected Okazaki in 2008, who emphasized that CBT functions effectively when residents treat tourism as a shared endeavor, with sustainability anchored in cooperation rather than individual gain [53]. Across sites, tourism operations were embedded in shared labor systems, association structures, and mutual accountability mechanisms that reinforced collective ownership.

In Marang-Marang Floating Cottage, interdependence was operationalized through a fully community-based seafood value chain where families harvested, supplied, prepared, and served seafood to visitors. Spouses and children contributed labor, distributing responsibilities across households. The association leader's assertion that their "only capital" was themselves reflected reliance on human effort and collective responsibility as the foundation of tourism sustainability. This pattern aligned with Kirby [54] who highlighted that interdependence enhances resilience by distributing labor, risk, and responsibility across members. Rather than concentrating authority, responsibilities were shared, reinforcing stability even during peak tourist periods.

The findings also demonstrated strong normative respect for government authority, particularly toward Local Government Units (LGUs), which communities regarded as legitimate governance partners. Witchayakawin et al. [55] emphasized that CBT becomes more sustainable when communities engage government institutions as collaborators rather than passive recipients of support. In Kud Pasangen, leaders noted that people "listen" to officials once policies are communicated, while residents in Marang-Marang stressed that they "value" LGU guidance and implement directives related to safety and regulation. Cooper and Knotts [56] highlighted that trust in local authorities strengthens compliance and facilitates smoother policy implementation, a pattern reflected in how barangay-issued guidelines and municipal tourism regulations were routinely followed. Tourism operators also underscored the importance of LGU coordination and sustained support in accessing resources and resolving operational concerns. Sustained institutional involvement remains critical for maintaining local tourism initiatives, particularly in communities with limited independent capacity [57].

Cross-site comparison revealed variation in how roles were institutionalized. In Lampinigan Island, council members remained actively engaged because they "know their roles" as barangay officials, demonstrating formalized responsibility tied to governance positions. In Kud Pasangen, youth reportedly "see each other's role," indicating intergenerational transmission of responsibilities within cultural programs. Marang-Marang exhibited strong labor-based interdependence anchored in association membership, while Tampalan demonstrated role clarity primarily within cultural preservation initiatives under organized community leadership. These variations reflected differences in participation density but shared a common structure of defined authority boundaries and collaborative engagement.

At the intergovernmental level, MTIT officers emphasized that they "cannot preempt" LGUs or bypass mayors, municipal tourism officers, or barangay officials, recognizing that tourism initiatives fall "under" LGU jurisdiction. This reinforced vertical role clarity within the decentralized system, where higher-level actors provided support without displacing local authority. Governance effectiveness emerged from coordinated interaction among clearly positioned actors, with LGUs functioning as central nodes linking community participation and upper-level institutional oversight. Figure 3 therefore captured both horizontal interdependence within communities and vertical role differentiation across governance tiers, demonstrating how sustainability integration depended on clearly understood responsibilities reinforced through collaborative practice.

Objective 3. Evaluate how sustainability principles are embedded within governance and administrative practices, especially environmental protection, resource management, and policy alignment.
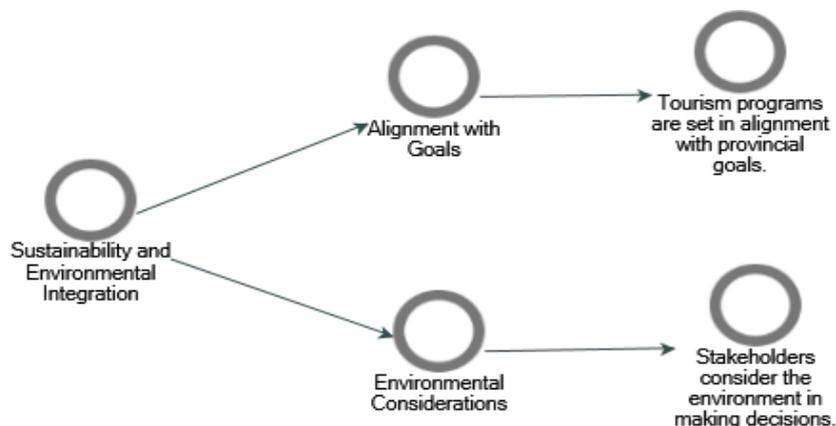
Figure 4. Sustainability and Environmental Integration.

It showed how sustainability principles were integrated into tourism governance through coordinated planning, institutional alignment, and community-driven environmental practices. Participant accounts consistently emphasized that tourism initiatives were not implemented as stand-alone projects but were deliberately aligned with provincial development priorities. MTIT stakeholders explained that tourism programs were designed to "complement the province's programs" and adhere to the "holistic development plan," ensuring coherence between sectoral initiatives and broader governance strategies. This structured alignment reflected the governance principle articulated by Bramwell and Lane [58], who argued that tourism becomes more sustainable when integrated with social, economic, and cultural development objectives rather than operating independently.

Participants described how MTIT, while functionally independent, operated under ministerial and provincial guidance, reinforcing vertical accountability within the decentralized system. This was captured in the statement: "you should not follow us; we should align with you." The emphasis on alignment rather than

competition between governance tiers demonstrated how institutional coordination strengthened policy coherence. Nicholls [59] noted that embedding tourism within wider development frameworks enhances legitimacy and long-term sustainability, a pattern evident in Basilan where tourism planning was positioned as part of a collective provincial vision. Similarly, Kasmin [60] argued that tourism functions most effectively when conceptualized as a vehicle for cultural preservation and community empowerment rather than purely economic expansion. Across the four sites, tourism initiatives supported weaving traditions, Schools of Living Tradition programs, and local livelihood systems, demonstrating multidimensional sustainability integration rather than isolated revenue generation.

The variation in the depth of environmental integration. In Marang-Marang, mangrove planting was routinely incorporated into tourism activities, with visitors participating in conservation initiatives as part of their experience. This practice illustrated community-embedded stewardship consistent with Cutillas et al. [61], who emphasized that sustainability initiatives are strengthened when local stakeholders actively engage in self-driven environmental responsibility. Suparak et al. [62] further highlighted that community-driven conservation reinforces ownership of natural resources, reflected in how mangrove rehabilitation activities were normalized within tourism operations. In Lampinigan Beach, residents described appointing a caretaker responsible for maintaining cleanliness and managing waste, demonstrating localized environmental management mechanisms. While these practices differed in scale, both sites exhibited structured ecological accountability integrated into daily operations.

Provincial policymakers reinforced environmental principles through explicit rejection of "extractive" tourism models, emphasizing subsistence values and respect for marine and terrestrial ecosystems. Xia [63] argued that governance systems prioritizing environmental stewardship alongside cultural and economic goals foster authentic and sustainable destinations. This approach was reflected in Basilan's positioning of natural and cultural assets as primary tourism strengths rather than large-scale infrastructure development. Strategic planning also considered tourism-seeking behaviors, as Reamico et al. [64] emphasized that aligning community offerings with visitor expectations supports sustainable outcomes. Participants underscored this perspective, with one official stating that the province does not need "big malls or resorts" because its cultural and environmental resources already define its identity.

Environmental protection was therefore embedded not only in policy discourse but in routine operational practices. Responsible tourism integrates environmental protection as both a prerequisite and outcome of development processes. Across Basilan's CBT sites, sustainability was institutionalized through daily stewardship activities, intergovernmental alignment, and community participation mechanisms. Although the intensity of environmental programming varied between stronger-governance sites such as Marang-Marang and more localized systems such as Tampalan, the shared governance framework illustrated in Figure 4 demonstrated that sustainability integration depended on coordinated planning, participatory implementation, and respect for ecological limits within the decentralized tourism system.
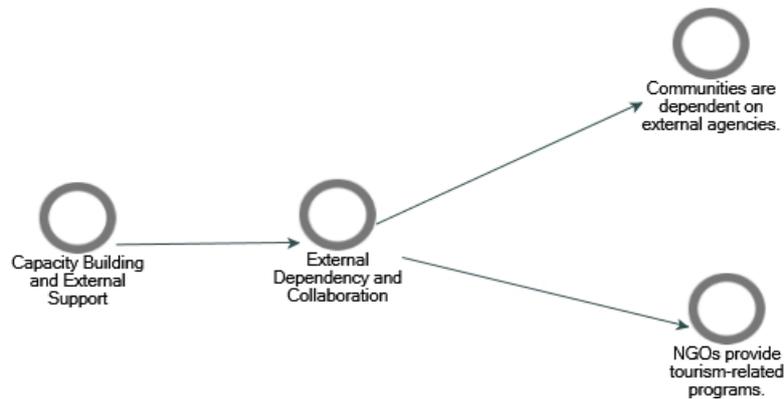
Figure 5. Capacity Building and External Support.

The structured network of capacity-building support and external partnerships sustaining community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives across the four study sites. Rather than depicting a generic partnership model, the figure reflects empirically observed flows of financial assistance, technical training, cultural reinforcement, and institutional facilitation linking community associations with LGUs, provincial offices, regional ministries, national agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Findings indicate that capacity building in Basilan's CBT sector operates through layered vertical reinforcement rather than isolated community initiative.

Across sites, external dependency emerged not as passive reliance but as a structurally embedded governance feature. Participants from Kud Pasangen School of Living Tradition and Marang-Marang Floating Cottage consistently emphasized that internal resources alone were insufficient to sustain training, compliance requirements, and operational upgrading. A Kud Pasangen leader explained that they "cannot easily provide or conduct trainings, seminars, capability building, [or] capacity building without their support," while a Marang-Marang leader stressed that "if we don't have support from our partners, it becomes useless." These statements reflect operational constraints tied to limited fiscal space, absence of in-house technical trainers, and irregular access to program funding. Tamtik and Colorado [65]. emphasized that multi-level governance relies on distributed authority and partnerships, where local actors depend on higher-level institutions and external expertise to navigate complex systems effectively. The Basilan case demonstrates this dynamic concretely: LGUs and regional offices do not replace community leadership but reinforce it through training facilitation, compliance guidance, and linkage to funding channels.

Kumar et al. [66] argued that external collaboration is essential for sustaining operations when communities possess cultural assets but lack technical or financial capacity. This pattern is observable in cross-site comparison. Marang-Marang and Kud Pasangen reported more sustained engagement with provincial tourism offices, MTIT-BARMM training programs, and NGO-backed workshops, resulting in more structured skill upgrading and institutional confidence. In contrast, Lampinigan and Tampalan described fewer formalized training cycles and more intermittent exposure to capacity-building activities, often dependent on barangay-level initiative or project-based outreach. Bridging social capital linkages with NGOs, LGUs, and national ministries enhanced access to resources, knowledge, and training, facilitating community participation in tourism. External partnership therefore functioned simultaneously as a compensatory mechanism for structural limitations and as a governance strategy for institutional strengthening.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) emerged as particularly influential capacity-building nodes within the governance network illustrated in Figure 5. Empirical evidence shows material and programmatic

contributions rather than abstract collaboration. For instance, JCI Quezon City extended a ₱20,000 donation to Marang-Marang to address equipment storage constraints, while the Asia Foundation provided ₱50,000 alongside technical training support. These financial infusions were not large-scale capital investments but targeted operational enhancements addressing specific gaps identified by community leaders. Such interventions accelerated compliance improvements, facility organization, and service readiness. In Kud Pasangen, the World Association of Muslim Youth supported the construction of a masjid, reinforcing both cultural identity and visitor accommodation capacity. Meanwhile, the "Lumah Ma Dilaut" initiative contributed to strengthening the Bajau Cultural Heritage Center in Tampalan by sustaining its School of Living Tradition. These examples demonstrate differentiated but context-responsive support across sites.

Participants further described NGOs as essential "partners in disseminating and distributing information," highlighting their role in expanding network reach beyond immediate LGU channels. This informational bridging function reduced isolation of peripheral communities and improved awareness of funding windows, regulatory updates, and tourism events. Cross-site evidence indicates that sites with denser NGO engagement particularly Marang-Marang and Kud Pasangen exhibited more structured program continuity, while sites with limited NGO presence relied more heavily on internal coordination and barangay-level mobilization. The variation does not negate community agency but reveals uneven access to institutional capital across localities.

Integrated multi-level support therefore operates as a reinforcing architecture. LGUs facilitate training endorsements and logistical coordination; provincial offices align programs with broader tourism strategies; MTIT-BARMM ensures technical standardization; national agencies provide sectoral resources; and NGOs inject flexible financial and cultural assistance. Reliance on external partners emerges as both a limitation and a strategic necessity in CBT, enabling communities to strengthen operational confidence, regulatory compliance, and organizational resilience. Figure 5 thus captures a differentiated but interconnected capacity-building ecosystem in which sustainability outcomes are shaped by the depth, continuity, and coordination of external reinforcement. Communities remain central actors, yet their ability to institutionalize sustainable tourism practices depends substantially on how consistently multi-level governance actors sustain capability development across sites.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that the integration of sustainable development within community-based tourism (CBT) in Basilan was shaped by the depth and consistency of multi-level governance administrative support. Comparative analysis across the four sites showed that sustainability outcomes were uneven and corresponded with variations in monitoring sophistication, vertical coordination intensity, funding access, and institutional continuity. Sites with stronger intergovernmental linkages, documented monitoring systems, sustained NGO engagement, and expanding association membership exhibited more institutionalized environmental stewardship, cultural programming, and financial accountability practices. In contrast, sites operating primarily through localized coordination mechanisms displayed less formalized reporting structures and more intermittent access to structured capacity-building support. These findings confirmed that local government units functioned as frontline governance anchors, while provincial, regional, national, and non-governmental actors reinforced sustainability integration through technical oversight, program alignment, resource facilitation, and standards monitoring.

The study further clarified that administrative capacity depth rather than decentralization alone determined how effectively sustainability principles were translated into operational practice. Governance asymmetry became evident when coverage intensity, monitoring rigor, and program continuity differed

across localities, indicating that formal multi-level structures do not automatically ensure equitable sustainability integration without sustained cross-level reinforcement. While the qualitative, site-specific design enabled contextualized analysis of governance processes, the findings were bounded by temporal scope and did not incorporate longitudinal performance indicators or detailed fiscal flow measurement. Future research may strengthen explanatory precision by integrating longitudinal governance metrics, comparative inter-provincial designs, and mixed-method approaches capable of examining the relationship between administrative reinforcement intensity and measurable sustainability outcomes in community-based tourism systems.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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