

ISRG JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND CULTURAL STUDIES (ISRGJHCS)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Humanit Cult Stud

ISSN: 3048-5436 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/gjhcs/>

Volume – III Issue -III (May-June) 2026

Frequency: Bimonthly



Developing Moringa Agrotourism to Improve the Economy of the Muna Community in Gunung Jati Village, Kendari City

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| **Received:** 17.06.2026 | **Accepted:** 21.06.2026 | **Published:** 25.06.2026

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Abstract

*Moringa Moringa oleifera Lam has long been cultivated by the Muna community in Gunung Jati Village, Kendari City, as a household food source and cultural practice brought from Muna Island since the late 1960s. Recent market demand for moringa leaves has created an opportunity to transform scattered plantings into a community-based agrotourism destination. This study examines the opportunities, barriers, and community-based solutions for developing moringa agrotourism to improve local livelihoods. Using ethnographic methods, data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 25 informants, including traditional leaders, educators, youth, and women from *dasa wisma* groups. Results show that Gunung Jati has strong potential due to its hilltop location overlooking Kendari Bay, historical Dutch-era sites, and collective cultural knowledge of moringa cultivation. However, barriers include irregular planting, limited processing skills, lack of tourism infrastructure, and weak institutional organization. The study proposes a constructivist model in which women's groups and youth manage agrotourism activities, product diversification, and cultural attractions. If implemented, moringa agrotourism can diversify income, create jobs, strengthen Muna identity, and contribute to Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 8, and 11. The findings provide a replicable model for community-based agrotourism in urban fringe areas of Eastern Indonesia.*

Keywords: *Moringa agrotourism, community-based tourism, Muna ethnic group, local economic development.*

Introduction

The pursuit of well-being and livelihood security is central to human development, as reflected in Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 8, and 11 (United Nations, 2015). In Indonesia, tourism and agriculture are increasingly integrated to create inclusive economic opportunities, particularly in peri-urban and coastal

regions. Agrotourism, the combination of agriculture and tourism, offers a pathway for rural and urban fringe communities to diversify income while preserving local knowledge and environment (Sastrayuda, 2010). Kendari City, the capital of Southeast Sulawesi, hosts diverse ethnic groups, including the

Muna community concentrated in Gunung Jati Village. The Muna migrated from Muna Island between the late 1960s and early 1970s to avoid a government resettlement program addressing water scarcity. They brought with them the tradition of cultivating moringa in home gardens for consumption (Sifatu et al., 2022). Recently, rising demand for moringa leaves in Kendari markets has led to expansion from home gardens to vacant land and even to Dutch colonial heritage sites in Gunung Jati. Gunung Jati is located on a hill overlooking Kendari Bay, offering scenic views of the Bahteramas Bridge, old city settlement, Universitas Halu Oleo campus, Al Alam Mosque, and the port. Culturally, there is collective awareness of moringa cultivation. Economically, most residents work as construction laborers, porters, fish vendors, and makers of traditional Muna cakes. This combination of scenic value, cultural practice, and economic need creates a strong basis for developing moringa agrotourism. Despite this potential, cultivation remains irregular, processing is limited to household use, and there is no organized tourism system. The research problem is: What are the opportunities, barriers, and community-defined solutions for transforming Gunung Jati into a moringa agrotourism destination? This study addresses that question using a constructivist approach that centers community knowledge and participation (Foucault, 1980).

Literature Review

Agrotourism and Community Economic Development Agrotourism integrates agricultural production with tourism experiences, providing visitors with opportunities to engage in farming activities, learn about local ecosystems, and local products. Scholars note that agrotourism enhances farm income, creates rural employment, and educates the public about agriculture and sustainability (Sastrayuda, 2010; Sudiasa, 2005). Key actors in agrotourism are farmers, tourists, and government or institutions. Their interaction determines success (Yuesti, 2015). Community-based tourism emphasizes local ownership, participation, and equitable benefit distribution (Suansri, 2003). Moringa as a Strategic Commodity Moringa oleifera is widely recognized as a "miracle tree" due to its high nutritional value and multipurpose use (Fahey, 2005). Leaves are rich in protein, vitamins A and C, calcium, and iron. It is drought-resistant and adaptable to tropical conditions, making it suitable for marginal lands in Eastern Indonesia. In Southeast Sulawesi, moringa has been traditionally cultivated based on local knowledge (Sifatu et al., 2022). Global demand for herbal and superfood products is growing at 6.8% annually, creating export opportunities for Indonesian producers (Global Wellness Institute, 2020).

Constructivist Approach to Local Development This study adopts a constructivist approach, following Foucault's (1980) view that knowledge is socially constructed through community discourse and practice. In Gunung Jati, the model of agrotourism development is built from community ideas, traditions, and local wisdom rather than imposed top-down. This aligns with community-based tourism principles that prioritize local agency and cultural continuity (Suansri, 2003).

Method

This research used ethnographic methods conducted in Gunung Jati Village, Kendari City, from June to September 2025. Data collection involved in-depth interviews, participant observation, and two focus group discussions with 25 purposively selected informants: traditional and community leaders, teachers, women from *dasa wisma* groups, and youth from *karang taruna* (Moleong, 2010). Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (2014)

interactive model: data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. Triangulation was applied through cross-checking interview, observation, and document data. The research process included mapping moringa cultivation, identifying tourism potential and constraints, participatory workshops to co-design a development model, and validation of the model with community members.

Results and Discussion

1. Potential for Moringa Agrotourism in Gunung Jati

Gunung Jati has three key assets: widespread moringa cultivation rooted in Muna cultural practice, a scenic hilltop location with views of Kendari Bay and city landmarks, and Dutch-era heritage sites including water towers and tunnels.



Figure 1. Moringa Agrotourism Potential in Gunung Jati Subdistrict (Doc, Suraya, R.S, 2025)

Several studies have shown that agrotourism can improve the welfare of rural communities. One commodity with significant potential for agrotourism development is moringa (*Moringa oleifera*). Moringa is known as the "miracle tree" because almost all of its parts are useful, from the leaves and flowers to the seeds and even the trunk (Winarno, F.G. 2018). Moringa leaves are rich in vitamins A and C, calcium, and iron, making them widely used as a nutritious food ingredient. Furthermore, moringa also has medicinal properties, processed into tea, powder, herbal capsules, and even natural cosmetics (Saras, T. 2022). The economic potential of moringa is evident in various developing countries, such as India and the Philippines, where it is processed into high-value commercial products.

These assets provide a basis for combining agro-education, cultural tourism, and heritage tourism. Currently, moringa is grown irregularly and used mainly for household consumption. However, interviews revealed strong community willingness to organize cultivation and develop tourism activities if supported with training and infrastructure. Women's groups and youth expressed interest in managing processing, guided tours, and cultural performances.



Figure 1. The Supporting Capacity of Moringa Agrotourism in Gunung Jati Village,

The image above depicts the facilities and infrastructure available for tourists to enjoy while touring the moringa plantation in Gunung Jati Village. The road or access road leading to Gunung Jati Village offers views of the Kendari Bay Bridge, a tourist icon of Kendari City. In the context of moringa, agrotourism can be designed through various activities, such as moringa garden tours, training in processing moringa products (tea, powder, capsules, and processed foods), and even moringa-based culinary festivals. This concept will strengthen moringa's position not only as a food crop but also as an educational tourist attraction with economic value. Furthermore, by utilizing local commodities, agrotourism can support the principle of local-based tourism, namely tourism development based on the strengths of local resources and oriented towards empowering local communities. This aligns with the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) concept, which positions local communities as key actors, not merely objects of development. Thus, moringa-based agrotourism is not merely agricultural tourism but also serves as an integrative vehicle for preserving local culture, raising environmental awareness, and creating new, sustainable economic opportunities.

Within this framework, moringa can be positioned as a tourism icon and an instrument for strengthening the cultural identity of the Gunung Jati Village community, which is inherent in the use of moringa in local culinary traditions. The role of agrotourism in community economic empowerment is significant because it can open up space for direct community participation in the tourism value chain. Unlike mass tourism, which is often dominated by large investors, agrotourism offers broader opportunities for small communities to participate, whether as farmers, micro-entrepreneurs, tour guides, or culinary and accommodation providers. According to research (Irianto, H., & Nurany, F. 2024), agrotourism can increase rural household income through business diversification, job creation, and strengthening the entrepreneurial capacity of local communities. In the context of developing moringa agrotourism in Gunung Jati Village, the community can be empowered through various economic activities, for example, by managing moringa gardens as tourist destinations, processing moringa derivatives into value-added products, and marketing these products to tourists.

2. Economic Opportunities and Barriers

Potential economic benefits include income diversification, job creation for women and youth, strengthening Muna cultural identity, and diversification of Kendari's tourism portfolio. Barriers identified were lack of standardized cultivation, limited processing skills, inadequate infrastructure, weak community organization, and limited coordination with government and private sector actors. These findings align with studies showing that community-based agrotourism often faces constraints in human capital, infrastructure, and market access (Nurrahman & Sulaiman, 2022).

3. Community-Based Development Model

Using a constructivist approach, the study co-developed a model with three components:

- a. Agro-education and Experience: Visitors participate in moringa planting, harvesting, and processing workshops.
- b. Product Diversification: Development of moringa tea, chips, soap, and herbal capsules by women's groups.

- c. Cultural and Heritage Integration: Guided tours combined with visits to Dutch-era sites and performances of Muna music and dance. The model follows CBT principles: community ownership, participation in decision-making, fair benefit sharing, and environmental sustainability (Suansri, 2003). Strategic

Recommendations

Four strategies are recommended: product and attraction diversification; infrastructure development; partnership and collaboration between local government, BUMDes, universities, and travel agents; and sustainable management applying sustainability principles and fair revenue distribution (UNWTO, 2020).

Conclusion

Moringa agrotourism in Gunung Jati Village has significant potential to improve the economy of the Muna community by leveraging existing cultural practices, scenic resources, and heritage assets. The study demonstrates that a community-centered, constructivist model can address local barriers while creating diversified income sources and strengthening cultural identity. For sustainability, success depends on strengthening community institutions, providing technical training, improving infrastructure, and building partnerships. Future research should examine market demand, digital marketing strategies, and the social-environmental impacts of scaling up the model.

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