

Blue Economy Potential Through Coastal Business Diversification as a Regional Development Strategy in Kabila Bone Subdistrict

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ABSTRACT

The blue economy provides a development framework that seeks to generate economic value from marine and coastal resources while maintaining social inclusion and ecological sustainability. Kabila Bone Subdistrict in Bone Bolango Regency has substantial coastal potential, particularly in fisheries, marine ecotourism, seafood processing, and small-scale services. However, the utilization of these resources has not been fully optimized because coastal livelihoods remain strongly dependent on capture fisheries, while business innovation, community capacity, capital access, and inter-actor coordination remain limited. This study examines the relationship between blue economy potential and coastal business diversification as a regional development strategy in Kabila Bone Subdistrict and analyzes its implementation through product innovation, community training and empowerment, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. The study employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation during January–February 2026 and involved eight informants representing the subdistrict government, coastal communities, fishers, local business actors, and marine tourism managers. The findings show that the development of whale shark ecotourism in Botubarani has become a major driver of coastal economic diversification. New activities include tourist boat rental, guiding services, coastal cuisine, souvenirs, seafood processing, and other marine-resource-based microenterprises. These activities have expanded household income opportunities, generated employment, and strengthened local economic resilience. Nevertheless, diversification remains uneven and is concentrated around tourism; seafood processing, aquaculture, and other sectors are still limited. Product innovation is mostly incremental, training programs are not consistently followed by mentoring, and collaboration among government, communities, and businesses remains largely informal. The study concludes that blue economy development can support sustainable regional development when diversification is accompanied by stronger institutional coordination, continuous capacity building, improved access to finance and technology, and more inclusive distribution of economic opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

The blue economy has increasingly been framed as a development approach that integrates economic activity, social welfare, and ecological sustainability in the utilization of marine and coastal resources. Rather than treating the sea solely as a source of commodities, the approach emphasizes sustainable use, resource efficiency, innovation, conservation, and equitable distribution of benefits. In Indonesia, this perspective is particularly relevant because coastal communities depend heavily on fisheries and other marine resources, while the country simultaneously faces pressures from climate variability, ecosystem degradation, and uneven access to economic opportunities (Bakti & Hakim, 2024; Darajati, 2023; Dewi et al., 2025).

At the policy level, blue economy principles have been associated with sustainable fisheries, marine conservation, value-added production, coastal tourism, and integrated marine governance. Yet the existence of policy frameworks does not automatically guarantee effective implementation at the local level. Previous studies cited in the source

manuscript identify persistent problems involving limited community capacity, weak inter-sectoral coordination, technological constraints, fragmented institutions, and inadequate spatial management of coastal areas (Rahim et al., 2024; Nuraini et al., 2022; Wahyuni et al., 2025).

A central issue is the high dependence of coastal households on a limited number of livelihood sources, particularly capture fisheries. Such dependence makes household income vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations, climate events, and changes in marine productivity. Diversification can therefore function as an adaptive strategy by creating additional sources of income through seafood processing, aquaculture, ecotourism, coastal services, and other marine-resource-based activities (Afifah et al., 2024; Apriandi et al., 2025). Diversification is not merely an increase in the number of businesses; it can also create value-added activities and link different parts of a local economic system.

Kabila Bone Subdistrict represents an important local setting for examining this issue. The study identifies coastal fisheries and marine ecotourism as major components of the local blue economy, with the whale shark tourism area in Botubarani functioning as a particularly visible source of new economic opportunities. The emergence of tourism has encouraged activities such as boat rental, guiding, food services, souvenir sales, and small-scale processing. At the same time, the source research indicates that the benefits are not yet evenly distributed and that other sectors remain underdeveloped.

The research gap addressed by this study concerns the limited empirical understanding of how blue economy principles are translated into concrete coastal diversification strategies at the subdistrict level. Much of the discussion in the literature is positioned at national or regional scales, whereas the institutional, social, and economic processes through which coastal communities actually diversify their livelihoods require closer examination. This study therefore focuses on Kabila Bone Subdistrict to connect blue economy potential, coastal business diversification, and sustainable regional development within one local analytical framework.

The study addresses two questions: (1) how is blue economy potential related to coastal business diversification in supporting regional development in Kabila Bone Subdistrict? and (2) how is the diversification strategy implemented through product innovation, community training and empowerment, and multi-stakeholder collaboration? The study contributes empirically by documenting the local transformation of coastal livelihoods and analytically by showing the institutional conditions that support or constrain diversification.

METHODS

Research Design and Study Area

This research employed a qualitative case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of coastal economic diversification in its local context. The study was conducted in Kabila Bone Subdistrict, Bone Bolango Regency, with particular attention to coastal communities and the whale shark ecotourism area in Botubarani. Field data collection was conducted during January–February 2026.

Participants and Data Sources

The study involved eight informants selected to represent the principal actors associated with coastal economic development: two subdistrict government representatives, two coastal community members, two fishers, one local business actor, and one marine tourism manager. Primary data were obtained through interviews and observation, while secondary data were obtained through relevant documents, government information, and research literature.

Code	Informant category	Interview date	Main analytical focus
P-01	Head of Economic and Development Section, Kabila Bone	4 Feb 2026	Diversification, innovation, training, income
P-02	Kabila Bone Subdistrict staff	4 Feb 2026	Sector diversification and sustainable regional development
M-01	Coastal community member	19 Feb 2026	Livelihood change and income diversification
M-02	Coastal community member	19 Feb 2026	Diversification, product innovation, training
NL-01	Fisher	19 Feb 2026	Access to training and livelihood alternatives
NL-02	Fisher	19 Feb 2026	Local economic resilience
PU-01	Local business actor	19 Feb 2026	Business collaboration, income, resilience
PW-01	Marine tourism manager	19 Feb 2026	Tourism innovation, income, employment, diversification

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection used observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Interviews were used to explore experiences, perceptions, business practices, opportunities, and constraints related to coastal diversification. Documentation supported verification and triangulation. Data analysis was conducted descriptively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, complemented by NVivo-assisted thematic visualization. The source study reports the use of word clouds, hierarchy charts, and project maps to identify recurring themes and relationships among actors and issues. The analysis focused on diversification strategy, product innovation, training and empowerment, multi-actor collaboration, income, local economic resilience, sectoral diversification, and sustainable regional development.

Qualitative rigor was supported through triangulation of interviews, observation, and documentation. The analysis remained grounded in the accounts and patterns identified in the field rather than treating the NVivo visualizations as statistical estimates.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Coastal Business Diversification as a Blue Economy Strategy

The findings indicate that coastal business diversification in Kabila Bone is in a transitional phase. Historically, many households depended heavily on capture fisheries and therefore faced income instability when fishing conditions deteriorated. The emergence of marine tourism, particularly whale shark tourism in Botubarani, has created a new economic center around which several complementary activities have developed.

The most visible diversification activities include food stalls and coastal cuisine, tourist boat rental, guiding services, souvenir sales, and tourism-related microenterprises. The government informant identified tourism as the most developed diversification sector because of the area's coastal tourism potential. Other sectors, including seafood processing and aquaculture, remain limited. This means that diversification has occurred, but it is not yet balanced across the full range of potential blue economy sectors.

The finding supports the argument that diversification can reduce dependence on capture fisheries, but it also reveals an important limitation: a local economy may shift from dependence on one sector to dependence on another if diversification is concentrated in tourism. In Kabila Bone, the tourism sector has generated a multiplier effect by creating demand for transport, food, guiding, accommodation-related services, and souvenirs, but stronger inter-sectoral linkages with seafood processing and aquaculture have yet to emerge.

Product Innovation

Product innovation is visible in two main forms: value-added seafood products and innovative marine tourism packages. Seafood processing includes products such as packaged salted fish, fish floss, and fish crackers. However, the source study finds that these innovations remain relatively simple and are primarily marketed locally. Informants identified limited capital, equipment, packaging quality, technical knowledge, and access to business loans as major constraints.

Tourism innovation is more developed. The marine tourism manager reported packages involving snorkeling and diving with whale sharks, wooden fishing-boat tours, glass-boat services, and drone documentation. These innovations extend the value of the natural attraction beyond direct visitation and create multiple service opportunities for local residents. The contrast between tourism innovation and seafood-product innovation suggests that market demand and visitor flows are currently stronger drivers of innovation than systematic public support for local processing enterprises.

The NVivo-based analysis in the source study characterizes the product innovation system as only partially connected. Government acts as a facilitator, while business actors experience the strongest constraints related to capital, technology, and market access. This indicates a gap between the existence of facilitation efforts and the practical resources required by micro and small enterprises.

Training and Community Empowerment

Training has been provided in areas such as seafood processing and coral-reef planting. However, the study finds that several programs were not followed by sustained mentoring. One community informant reported receiving training on fish floss production and packaging but lacking subsequent assistance, particularly in marketing. Another fisher reported not having participated in government training and indicated that information about programs was often received informally through neighbors.

These findings demonstrate that one-off training is insufficient to build a sustainable diversification ecosystem. Skills must be connected with equipment, financing, market access, business management, packaging, digital promotion, and continued mentoring. The problem is therefore not only a lack of training but a weak continuity between capacity building and enterprise development.

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Collaboration among government, communities, tourism managers, and businesses has emerged but remains largely informal and operational. Local businesses employ community members and purchase fish from local fishers, while interactions with government often focus on administrative matters such as licensing. Government representatives acknowledge the need for stronger forums and more structured coordination among stakeholders. The findings indicate that collaboration has not yet become a fully institutionalized governance mechanism. The actors are connected through individual transactions and programs, but they do not yet operate within a strong, regular, and integrated platform for planning, problem solving, monitoring, and value-chain development. This fragmentation constrains the ability of local actors to build stronger linkages between tourism, fisheries, processing, and other blue economy sectors.

Increased Community Income

The development of whale shark ecotourism has generated observable changes in local income opportunities. Government and community informants reported that visitor arrivals created new income sources, including boat rental and guiding services. A community informant explained that household income is now more diverse than before, when fishing was the dominant source and income could fall sharply when fishing conditions were unfavorable.

The source study also documents a mechanism for distributing tourism-related income, including a reported 20 percent allocation to the village and 45 percent as an incentive for the management committee. The study interprets this as an initial step toward organized benefit distribution, while also noting that access to tourism opportunities and benefits remains uneven. Households with better access to capital, information, and business opportunities are more able to benefit from the new economic activities.

Local Economic Resilience

Diversification has strengthened local economic resilience by creating alternatives to capture fisheries. When fishing activity is constrained by season or weather, tourism services, food businesses, and other activities can continue to provide income. The shift therefore reduces, although does not eliminate, household exposure to a single livelihood source.

However, resilience remains incomplete because the diversification structure is still strongly centered on tourism. A more resilient coastal economy would have interconnected fisheries, processing, aquaculture, tourism, and maritime services, allowing households and enterprises to shift between activities as market and environmental conditions change. The findings therefore support a view of resilience as a system property rather than simply the existence of several small businesses.

Sectoral Diversification

The study identifies tourism as the dominant sector, followed by food services, boat rental, guiding, souvenirs, and limited seafood processing. Fishers and community members are increasingly recognizing that dependence on capture fisheries alone is difficult to sustain. Some households have begun experimenting with alternative businesses, but the scale remains limited.

The resulting structure can be described as emerging diversification rather than fully integrated diversification. The tourism sector has established relatively strong market linkages, whereas processing and aquaculture have weaker institutional and commercial connections. This finding is important because diversification should ideally create inter-sectoral linkages and value-chain effects, not simply add isolated activities.

Sustainable Regional Development

The study finds that blue economy activities have begun to influence broader regional development. Whale shark tourism has stimulated local economic activity and has been associated with improvements in tourism-supporting infrastructure and public facilities. Employment opportunities have expanded through boat services and guiding, with participation involving fishers, women, and young people.

At the same time, sustainable regional development remains at an early stage. The source study identifies limited operational policy support, weak coordination, and incomplete sectoral diversification as continuing constraints. Sustainable development therefore depends on maintaining the economic benefits of tourism without undermining whale shark populations and coastal ecosystems. The local development trajectory requires stronger institutional arrangements, environmental safeguards, and broader participation in the benefits of growth.

Integrated Discussion

Taken together, the findings demonstrate a clear relationship between blue economy potential and coastal business diversification, but the relationship is mediated by institutional and social conditions. Coastal resources create

opportunities; tourism converts part of that potential into market demand; community entrepreneurship transforms demand into businesses; and government and other stakeholders influence whether those businesses can become durable components of the local economy.

The findings also qualify a simple assumption that blue economy development automatically produces sustainable and inclusive growth. In Kabila Bone, positive economic effects are evident, yet diversification remains uneven, collaboration is fragmented, and non-tourism sectors are relatively weak. The empirical contribution of the study is therefore to show how the blue economy is experienced at the micro level: not as a fully integrated policy package, but as a gradual and uneven transition shaped by local initiative, market opportunity, institutional capacity, and access to resources.

The results are broadly consistent with previous work cited in the source manuscript. Apriandi et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of diversification for coastal household resilience; Bakti and Hakim (2024) highlight institutional and coordination challenges in blue economy implementation; and studies on marine tourism identify the potential for multiplier effects and increased community income. The present study adds a subdistrict-level case showing that these processes depend heavily on the quality of local institutional linkages and the distribution of access to economic opportunities.

Policy Implications

The findings suggest several policy directions for local coastal development. First, diversification policy should move beyond tourism promotion toward an integrated coastal value-chain strategy connecting fisheries, seafood processing, aquaculture, tourism, food services, transport, and creative products. This can reduce the risk of replacing one form of economic dependence with another.

Second, community capacity-building should be redesigned as a continuous support cycle. Training should be linked to follow-up mentoring, equipment support, access to finance, packaging and quality improvement, digital marketing, and market development. Priority should be given to groups that currently have limited access to tourism and business opportunities.

Third, the subdistrict needs a more structured multi-stakeholder forum involving government, coastal communities, tourism managers, fishers, local businesses, and relevant private or academic partners. Such a forum can clarify roles, coordinate programs, identify value-chain bottlenecks, and support joint monitoring of environmental and economic outcomes.

Fourth, tourism development should incorporate explicit ecological safeguards. The whale shark attraction is an ecological asset as well as an economic asset. Long-term regional development therefore requires visitor-management practices, ecosystem monitoring, community participation, and enforcement of conservation principles so that short-term economic benefits do not undermine the resource base.

Finally, benefit distribution should be made more inclusive and transparent. Local government and tourism management institutions can improve information access, participation, and mechanisms for involving fishers, women, youth, and small businesses in the expanding blue economy.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that blue economy potential in Kabila Bone Subdistrict is closely connected with the emergence of coastal business diversification and with changes in the local development structure. Whale shark ecotourism in Botubarani has become the most important driver of new economic activity, creating opportunities in boat rental, guiding, food services, souvenirs, and other tourism-related businesses. Seafood processing and other coastal enterprises also exist, but their development remains limited.

The diversification process has contributed to more varied income opportunities, employment creation, and stronger local economic resilience. Nevertheless, the process is not yet fully integrated or evenly distributed. Product innovation remains relatively simple outside tourism; training programs lack consistent follow-up; access to capital, technology, and markets remains constrained; and multi-stakeholder collaboration is largely informal. Sustainable regional development therefore requires an institutional transition from fragmented initiatives toward coordinated, inclusive, and environmentally responsible blue economy governance.

The study recommends strengthening local policy implementation, continuous community capacity development, financing and technology access, structured stakeholder collaboration, and environmental safeguards for marine tourism. Future research may examine longer-term changes in household income, gender and youth participation, value-chain integration, and ecological outcomes using mixed-method or longitudinal designs.

Declarations

Author Contributions

Anjelika Karim: conceptualization, field investigation, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation. Abdul Wahab Podunge and Jefri Polinggapo: supervision, methodological guidance, and critical review. Robby Hunawa, Nirmala A. Sahi, and Dewi Walahe: academic review and contribution to interpretation and manuscript refinement.

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Conflict of Interest

The source manuscript does not report any competing interests.

Data Availability

The study data consist primarily of qualitative interview, observation, and documentary materials collected during the research period. Access to underlying interview materials should be subject to participant confidentiality and applicable institutional requirements.

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